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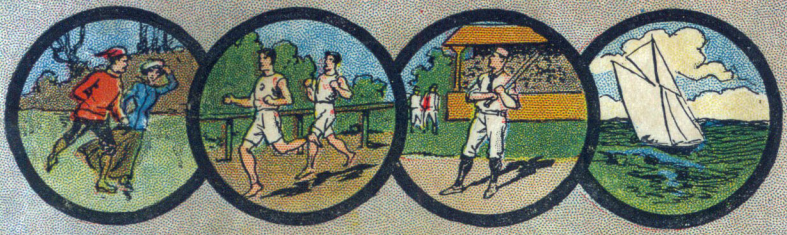
Frank Merriwell's Brother

BY Burt L. Standish



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Frank Merriwell's Brother

OR

The Greatest Triumph of All

BY

BURT L. STANDISH

AUTHOR OF

"The Merriwell Stories"

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Frank Merriwell's Brother

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FRANK MERRIWELL'S BROTHER.

CHAPTER I.

A WARM RECEPTION.

When Frank Merriwell, in a great hurry, flung open the door of his room and sprang in, he was little prepared for the reception that followed.

From all sides they leaped upon him, clutched him, surrounded him, hemmed him in. There were exactly thirteen of them, and he was alone and unarmed.

Never before had Merriwell quailed in the face of odds, but now he took one look at them and then flung up his hands, crying:

"I surrender!"

They clutched those uplifted hands and dragged them down. They grasped him about the body, around the neck, anywhere, everywhere. Howls of joy arose.

"We've got you!" they yelled.

Then they wrenched at his hands, one after another, as if trying to tear his arms from their sockets. Then they thumped him on the back, the shoulders, and the chest.

On the outskirts of the attacking mob one wild-eyed fellow fought like a demon to get at Merry.

"Got my vay oud of!" he roared, as he butted into the mob. "Break away! Let me got ad him!"

"Git aout!" cried another, a tall, lank chap, as he put his foot against the fat stomach of the one who was fighting to reach Merry. "Go lay daown, gol ding ye!"

"Give me a cloob!" roared one with a strong brogue of the Ould Sod. "It's mesilf that'll be afther makin' a way here!"

Then he wedged his shoulder into the crowd and flung the others aside till he could get in and grasp Merry's hand.

"Ye spalpane!" he shouted. "It's a soight fer sore oies ye are! Begorra, Oi'm ready to die wid joy!"

"Barney Mulloy!" laughed Frank, as he wrung the hand of the honest Irish youth. "I'm delighted!"

"Let me git in there!" rasped the tall, lank fellow. "If ye don't make way fer me, I'll bet a darn good squash somebody gits bumped!"

Then he succeeded in getting hold of Merry's free hand.

"Oh, say!" he cried; "I'm jest reddy to lay right daown and die frum satisfaction."

"Ephraim Gallup!" burst from Merry.

"Right off the farm, b'gosh!" chuckled Ephraim.

"Vy don't you both gone und died alretty!" squawked the one who had been kicked, as he came charging in and drove against Mulloy and Gallup. "Id vould peen a goot thing der coundry vor. Yaw! I vandt to shook Vrank Merrivell by my handt! Got avay!"

"And Hans Dunnerwurst!" exclaimed Merriwell, as he grasped the outstretched, pudgy hand of the fat young Dutchman.

"Dot vos me," nodded Hans, in delight. "How you peen, Vrankie, ain't id? You vos glatness to seen me. Yaw!"

"You fellows give me that fired teeling—I mean that tired feeling!" declared a handsome, curly-haired youth, as he thrust Mulloy, Gallup, and Dunnerwurst aside. "Why don't you let somebody else have a show? I want to fake his shin—I mean shake his fin!"

"It's Harry Rattleton!" Frank ejaculated, as he returned the hearty hand-grip of the curly-haired youth. "Dear old Harry!"

There were tears in Rattleton's eyes, and his honest face showed the deep emotion he felt and tried to hide.

Fighting, squealing, kicking at each other, two little fellows now plunged against Rattleton. One was red-headed and freckle-faced, while the other had a snub

nose and a cherublike face. But they seemed trying to scratch out each other's eyes.

"Me first!" yelled the cherub.

"I guess nit!" shrieked the one with freckles.

"Here! here! that will do!" smiled Merry, as he grasped them and pulled them apart. "It seems to me you chaps are old enough to quit fighting like kids."

Then they both turned and seized his hands, which they wrung with all the strength at their command, yelling:

"How are you, Merry? We're glad you see us!"

"The same Stubbs and the same Griswold," nodded Frank.

"The same Merriwell!" they returned, in unison. "Only more famous!"

"I reckon it's my turn to shake Mr. Merriwell's paw," said a strong, hearty voice, as a big, broad-shouldered youth put Bink and Danny aside. "That's whatever!"

"Badger, too!" Frank cried, as his hand met that of the Westerner. "This is untold pleasure!"

"You bet it is!" nodded Buck.

"I trust you'll not overlook me, Merriwell," said a pleasant, soft, well-modulated voice, as a handsome, fine-faced youth stepped in, with an agreeable smile and a white hand outheld.

"Jack Diamond, by all that's good!" Merriwell gasped, as he took that hand. "Back from Europe?"

"Yes, Merriwell; back in time to see you win your final honors."

The handsome Virginian looked handsomer than ever.

Greg Carker, Bert Dashleigh, Jim Hooker, Ralph Bingham, and Oll Packard were the others who had crowded about Merry when he entered the room, and they were filled with great joy because of his pleasure in meeting those old friends of other days.

"You'll have to have us arrested for breaking and entering, Merry," said Carker. "I knew these fellows were going to be here, and we planned this little surprise. I swiped your duplicate door-key so that I could admit them to this room."

"I'll forgive you, Carker, if you do not let the earthquake rumble."

"I think," said Greg, "that I'll keep the earthquake suppressed till commencement is over."

"Do," urged Frank.

Oliver Packard did not have much to say. He had been accepted as one of Merry's friends, for all of his vicious brother, Roland, the twin who looked—or had looked in the past—exactly like him. Oliver had all the fine instincts of a gentleman, and the conduct of

Roland had worn upon him and given him lines of care. It was now known among the students that, since his final defeat by Merriwell, Roland was fast becoming an inebriate, and it was said that he would not be able to finish his medical course. Of course, this worried Oliver, but he tried to hide his own troubles.

Hooker, once an outcast, was another who had received a warm hand-grasp from Merriwell and had felt in his heart that he was most fortunate to be there.

Ralph Bingham, the big sophomore, had taken part in the struggle, his heart throbbing with satisfaction.

"There are others coming," he now declared. "All the rest of the flock will be here right away."

"You mean——"

"Hodge, Ready, Gamp, Browning, and the others."

"In that case," said Badger, "I reckon we'd better bring forward the reserves at once."

"The reserves?" said Merry.

"Yes. Ladies."

Buck flung back a portière, and then out flitted four beautiful girls, who had been waiting for that moment.

Elsie was there, laughing with joy, her sweet face flushed, her blue eyes like the depths of a lake-mirrored sky. The girl with Elsie put her forward, and it was Elsie who murmured in Merry's ear:

"Frank, we're all so happy and so proud of you! Inza is the happiest and proudest!"

"Inza!" exclaimed Frank, in great surprise, for he had not dreamed of seeing her there, for she was in mourning for her father.

"Frank!"

He looked deep into her dark eyes, which gazed upon him in loving pride.

"This," he said, restraining himself and steadying his voice, "is a pleasure that was entirely unexpected."

He gave Elsie his other hand.

"We rather reckoned you'd be pleased," said Badger. "But I don't want you to forget that the former Miss Lee is now Mrs. Badger, and I'll not permit you to look at her the way you're looking at those young ladies."

Frank flushed and laughed, turning to the handsome, brown-eyed girl at the side of the Westerner.

"Miss Lee—no, Mrs. Badger," he said, "I am delighted to see you again."

Winnie gave him her hand.

"Don't mind Buck," she said. "He's jealous of everybody. He'd be jealous of an Indian."

"That's whatever," confessed the Kansan. "I allow I'm built that way, and I can't help it. I know I make an onery fool of myself sometimes, but Mrs. Badger

has a nice little way of forgiving me. I rather think she likes it, to tell the truth."

Diamond touched Frank's arm. There was a look of deep pride on his face, mingled with a faint smile.

"Permit me," he said.

Merry turned.

"My wife, Mr. Merriwell," said the Southerner.

A handsome, dark-eyed girl, somewhat resembling Inza, stood there.

"Your—your wife?" exclaimed Frank.

The girl was the sister of Dolph Reynolds, whom he had met in London.

"Yes, sir," said Jack. "We didn't invite you to the wedding, as it took place rather suddenly on the other side of the pond. I hope you'll pardon us for the failure to notify you, but we decided to do so in person."

"Diamond," said Frank heartily, as he grasped the hand of his college comrade, "I offer you my most sincere congratulations. I think you are a lucky dog."

The English girl was blushing and laughing.

"You do not congratulate me," she said. "And you know I had to make an explanation before he would come back to me after he became jealous of my cousin."

"I'll reserve my congratulations," said Merry smi-

lingly, "till I find that he has made you a good husband."

"Merriwell, I think that right mean of you!" Diamond exclaimed, somewhat nettled. "Your words and manner are calculated to arouse distrust and suspicion in her mind. Do you think that quite fair?"

"Perhaps not," confessed Frank, seeing how seriously Jack took it. "Far be it from me to arouse anything of the sort by words spoken in jest."

The Virginian breathed easier.

"Now we're so nicely introduced all round, let's try to be real jappy and holly—I mean happy and jolly," said Harry Rattleton. "Hasn't any girl married me yet?"

"I see," said Bink Stubbs, "that idiocy among the female sex is decreasing."

"There are ladies present," said Harry severely, as he glared at Bink. "Thus you are saved for the time."

"Here!" cried Griswold, taking down a gilded horseshoe from the wall and offering it to the other little chap. "Take it. You're dead in luck."

Stubbs regarded the horseshoe doubtfully.

"Do you regard horseshoes as lucky?" he asked.

"Of course," was the answer.

"Then," said Bink, "the horse I bet on the last time was running barefooted. Cluck, cluck; git ap!"

"Bah!" retorted Danny. "A clean swipe out of the

comic column of some paper. Say, who's your favorite writer, anyhow?"

"My father."

"Your father?"

"Yes."

"What did he ever write?"

"Checks."

"They're off!" exclaimed Rattleton. "You can't stop them."

"You know you can always stop a river by damming it," grinned Bink.

"But you can't stop an alarm-clock that way," chipped in Danny.

"That will do!" said Frank severely, although he was laughing inwardly. "This occasion is not suited for such stale jokes."

"Stale!" said Danny.

"Stale!" echoed Bink.

"And they are the very best in our repertoire," declared the little red-headed chap.

"Then your repertoire needs replenishing," said Merry.

So the little jokers were repressed for the time, although they were sure to break out again and again at the slightest provocation, or without any provocation.

"What makes us feel real bad," said Diamond, "is

that we were unable to get along soon enough to witness the great ball-game to-day between Yale and Harvard. I felt sure Yale would win."

"Merriwell won the game himself," declared Oliver Packard, who had once played on the nine, but whose standing as an athlete and whose chance to take part in athletic sports had been ruined by the actions of his brother. "It was the greatest work I ever saw."

"Right!" agreed Carker, the socialist, also a ball-player of no mean caliber. "The manner in which he stopped Harvard from scoring near the end of the game was enough to set every Yale man wild with admiration. It was great!"

"Great!" nodded Jim Hooker.

"Magnificent!" laughed Bert Dashleigh.

"Hot stuff!" nodded Ralph Bingham.

Rattleton, Stubbs, Griswold, Gallup, Dunnerwurst, and Mulloy had reached the field after the game began, but in the vast throng they had been unobserved by Merry. All were profuse in their compliments for Frank, but he cut them short.

"Every man on the nine played as if his life depended on the result," he declared. "They deserve just as much credit as I do."

But not one who had seen the game would agree to that.

While they were talking, the door opened, and Bart

Hodge entered, followed by Browning, Ready, Mason, Carson, Morgan, Starbright, Gamp, and Benson.

The principal members of the varsity nine, the ones who had been mainly responsible for the winning of the championship, had come to that room to gather round their captain for the last time before the parting that might break their ranks forever.

Of course, they were surprised, and, of course, there was more hand-shaking and introducing of Mrs. Diamond. The Virginian was showered with congratulations.

Jack Ready stood and looked at Juliet with an expression of regretful sadness on his face.

"It's too bad!" he finally sighed.

"What's too bad, Mr. Ready?" she asked, in surprise.

"That we did not meet before this hot-headed young man from the warm and reckless South drifted across your horizon. Alas, you are no longer a lass! It is too late, too late!"

He seemed to heave a great sob from the depths of his bosom.

"Sir!" exclaimed Diamond, "what do you mean? Are you seeking to insult me?"

"Nay, nay, my dear old college chum," said Ready, who really took extreme delight in irritating Diamond. "Far be it from me to indulge in such rudeness. Still

I cannot help thinking that you would not have stood a ghost of a show had I happened along in advance of you. I would have dawned on her delighted vision like a ten-thousand-dollar diamond sunburst, while you would have resembled a two-dollar rhinestone cluster. I have no desire to cause you misery, so I shall take care not to let her see much of me, well knowing it will lead her in time to regret her choice of a side partner if she often beholds my intellectual countenance and fascinating figure."

Juliet bit her lip and suppressed a laugh, but Diamond, knowing Ready was guying him, felt like hitting him.

"It's a good thing for you," whispered the Southerner, "that the ladies are here."

"How?"

"If they were not, I'd give you a black eye!"

"Go 'way!" said Ready. "I think you're horrid!"

Frank's rooms were crowded now, and a chatter of conversation arose. Of course, Merry was the center of interest, but he found an opportunity to draw back and look around. These were the loyal friends he had made—the dear friends of his school and college days. They had clung to him through thick and thin, and he felt his heart swelling with affection toward them all. Even Dade Morgan was included, for

Morgan had tried his best in these final college days to prove that he was repentant for the past and ready to do anything in his power to make atonement.

Memories of old times came rushing upon Frank in that moment. He thought of his first meeting with Hodge at Fardale, and of the adventures, struggles, and triumphs that followed. He thought of his coming to Yale, of his freshman struggles, of the enemies who seemed to rise around him as he toiled upward and onward, of the friends who were here and who had remained firm in every change that befell him.

Oh, those grand days of toil and pleasure at Yale! He felt that he would give much to live them all over again. But the end had come, and now he was going out into the world—going to bid Yale farewell!

This thought brought him a feeling of unspeakable sadness. It seemed that he was leaving the only home he knew. Home—yes, it was home for him. In truth, he had no other. Life lay before him, and he was to set his course toward a high goal when he received his sheepskin and turned his back on his alma mater. But he felt that he was being parted from the happiest portion of his life.

Then his eyes fell on the girls. Bart had found Elsie and was talking to her, his dark face flushed, his eyes glowing. She smiled and nodded as he was speaking.

"They are happy," said Frank, to himself.

He did not know that at that moment Hodge was praising him to the skies, telling what a remarkable game he had played and how he had covered himself with glory in the battle against Harvard. He did not know that somehow such praise was the pleasantest thing Elsie Bellwood could hear.

He saw Inza, and she looked toward him. She smiled, and he felt his heart throb.

Home! Yes, Yale had been his home; but now before his vision there seemed to rise the picture of another home and he hastened to Inza's side.

CHAPTER II.

ANTON MESCAL.

A dark-faced, Spanish-appearing man stopped Roland Packard on the steps of the Tontine Hotel.

"Get out of the way!" snarled Roland, who had been drinking.

"Wait," said the man, in a soft, not unpleasant voice. "I wish to speak to you. It is important."

Roland was in anything but a pleasant mood. He had seen Frank Merriwell cover himself with glory in the game against Harvard, and, having foolishly bet that the Cambridge men would win the championship, he had taken to drink immediately after the game.

"It's got to be cursed important!" he snapped, looking the stranger over. "I don't know you. What's your name?"

"Anton Mescal."

"Never heard it before. Are you one of these blooming old grads who are overrunning the town?"

"No."

"Then what in blazes——"

A group of men came out of the hotel and descended the steps. They had gray hair about their

temples, and some of them were bald beneath their hats. They carried canes, their faces were flushed, and they looked hilariously happy. They were a group of "old grads," and they had been celebrating Yale's victory. With them the celebration had just begun; it would extend all through the night. As they rolled down the steps, clinging to one another's arms, they were talking excitedly:

"He's the greatest pitcher Yale ever produced!" asserted one.

"Come off, Smithy, old man!" cried another. "You know the class of 'Umpty-six had the champ. This fellow——"

"Don't talk, Sluthers!" interrupted another. "Baseball was different then. Whoever heard of curves? This Merriwell——"

"Is a marvel!"

"He's a dandy!"

"'Rah for Merriwell!"

"Let's all cheer! Yow! I feel just like cheering! Cheer for Merriwell!"

Then they bumped against Roland Packard, who snarled at them. One of them grasped him; others followed the example of that one. They bore him down the steps to the sidewalk.

"What's the matter with you?" the grad who had grasped him first demanded. "Are you a sorehead?

Well, by thunder, I want to hear you cheer for Merriwell!"

"You'll want a long time!" declared Roland, savagely. "Let go of my collar!"

"Boys," said the old fellow fiercely, "here's a chap who won't cheer for Merriwell."

"Shoot him!" advised another, who was rather unsteady on his feet. "Don't bother with him! Shoot him on the spot, Bilton!"

"What spot?" asked Bilton.

"Any old spot."

"All right," said the one who had Roland by the collar, "I'll do it."

He was just intoxicated enough to be reckless, and he actually took a revolver out of his hip pocket.

"Brought this to celebrate with," he declared. "Loaded it for that purpose; but I guess I'll shoot this fellow."

Then he fired straight at Roland's breast.

Packard fell back with a gasping cry, and the dark-faced man caught him. The other old grads were appalled by the act of their companion, who himself was rather dazed, not having intended to fire the revolver; but he quickly recovered, saying:

"He isn't hurt, gentlemen! The danged thing is loaded with blanks."

Packard threatened to call for the police, not one of whom happened to be near.

Not wishing to get into trouble on account of the reckless act of their companion, the old grads hastened away.

Anton Mescal, the man with the dark face, laughed a little, as he said:

"Is this the East? Why, I didn't suppose men were so careless with their guns here. For a moment I fancied I must be at home."

Packard swore.

"Infernal old fools!" he muttered. "I'm going to follow and have them arrested! I'll put that drunken idiot in the jug for this! Why, he would have shot me dead if the thing had been loaded with a ball cartridge!"

"Better let them go," urged Mescal. "I want to talk with you about something important."

"But I don't know you."

"I introduced myself just before those men attempted to stampede us."

Packard seemed in doubt. He wanted to follow and make trouble for the man who had been so reckless with his revolver, and yet something was urging him to listen to the stranger, who claimed to have important business with him.

"If we stay here," he said, "we'll get bumped into again by these gray-haired Yale men of other days."

"Yet I must stay here. Let's get off the steps, where we can watch both entrances. I am not going to be given the slip again."

"What are you talking about?"

"Something I will explain if you prove to be the man I think you are."

"You are from the West?"

"That's right, partner. Come down here."

They moved aside on the walk, where they took pains to avoid the groups of hilarious men who were circulating in that vicinity.

"You do not like Merriwell," said the man who called himself Mescal. "You refused to cheer for him, even when that man drew a gun on you."

"I didn't suppose the howling chump was crazy enough to shoot."

"Still you refused to cheer for Merriwell, and everybody else is howling for him."

"What of that?" asked Packard suspiciously. "Haven't I got a right to refuse?"

"Of course. The very fact that you did refuse convinced me that I had made no mistake in my man. You dislike Merriwell, when everybody else seems wild about him. You seem to be his only enemy here."

"That's right. There were enough of them once, but I'm the only one left."

"What has become of them all?"

"He has triumphed over them, and they have bowed down to worship him. They are howling themselves hoarse over him to-night."

"You mean——"

"They have become his friends, or else they have been driven out of college."

"How does it happen that you have not succumbed?"

"Because I will not!" panted Roland fiercely.

"He has never defeated you?"

Packard hesitated about answering, for he knew that in everything that had brought about a contest between himself and Merriwell the latter had been victorious.

"Only temporarily," he asserted. "I never give up."

"Good!" exclaimed Mescal. "I am more than ever satisfied that you are the very man I want."

Packard now demanded a full explanation. His curiosity had been awakened. Still Mescal, the soft-spoken man from the West, was rather cautious.

"Would you like to strike Merriwell a last blow?" he asked.

"Would I?" said the medic. "Ask me!"

For a moment the Westerner knitted his brows.

He had asked Packard, and the slang of the East bothered him. But the expression on Packard's face demonstrated his meaning, and Anton Mescal nodded.

"I thought so," he said. "I may be able to give you the opportunity."

"But you have not explained," insisted Roland.

"I will. It takes a little time."

"Then let's go in here and get a drink. I'm dry and tired."

Mescal shook his head, grasping the student by the arm.

"Stay here," he directed. "It is necessary if you wish to strike Merriwell."

This surprised Roland.

"What are you coming at?" he growled. "Think I'm going to hit him with my fist?"

"No. I am watching for a man who is in that hotel. I must not miss that man when he comes out."

"How is he connected?"

"I have followed him pretty nearly three thousand miles, trying to watch him night and day. Four times he has given me the slip, and four times I have picked up his trail again. I have tried in every possible way to accomplish my purpose before he could reach this place, but thus far I have failed."

This was interesting, and yet Packard failed to see how it was related to Merriwell.

"I'll explain," said the Westerner. "This man is the bearer of an important message to Frank Merriwell."

"Ah! that's it?"

"Yes."

"Well, you can't stop him now unless you kidnap or kill him."

"I don't want to stop him."

"What, then?"

"I want to get hold of that message."

"You wish to know what it is?"

"I know now."

"Hey? Then why do you wish to get hold of it? Why the dickens have you put yourself to so much trouble?"

"Because I do not wish it to reach the hands of Merriwell."

"The bearer——"

"Hasn't the least idea what the message is."

"Oh-ho!"

"He is simply a messenger—nothing more. He has been instructed to deliver an oilskin envelope to Merriwell. He knows absolutely nothing of the contents of that envelope. If he were to lose it, he would fail utterly in his task."

Packard nodded, and made a motion for the man to go on.

"This message," said Mescal, "is of the utmost importance to Merriwell. It will do him great damage not to receive it. Get it and place it in my hands, and you will strike Merriwell a terrible blow. Besides that, I will give you five hundred dollars in cold cash."

"Five hundred dollars?" gasped Packard doubtingly.

"Just that. I mean it, and here is the money, to convince you that I can keep my word."

The Westerner displayed a roll of bills, the outside one being for the amount of five hundred dollars.

Now, Roland Packard was involved in debt, and knew not how to clear himself. Of a sudden, he fancied he saw a way to wipe out his debts and strike a blow at Merriwell at the same time, and his bloodshot eyes shone greedily.

"How am I to do this?" he asked.

"That is for you to settle."

"You mean that——"

"That you are to find a way. I am at the end of my resources, else I would not have applied to you. It was by chance that I heard you spoken of as the only enemy of Merriwell remaining in Yale, and it was by

chance—a lucky one—that you happened along and were pointed out. I lost no time in stopping you right here, hoping you might be the man to do this work."

"I'll do it if possible; but how is it to be done?"

"Again I say that is something for you to find out. I will point out to you the man who has the message, and you are to follow him and get it if you can. If you succeed, the money is yours the moment you place that oilskin envelope in my hands. Are you ready to try it?"

"You bet! When——"

"Now!" whispered Mescal, as he stepped behind Packard, so that the student was between him and a man who was descending the steps of the Tontine. "There goes the man with the message!"

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERIOUS MESSAGE.

The man with the message was smooth-faced and shrewd-appearing. He stepped out from the Tontine briskly. He was dressed in a plain gray suit of clothes.

"After him!" whispered Mescal. "He has the message! Get it somehow—anyhow! Get it before Merriwell reads it!"

"I'll do my best," promised Packard. "Where'll I find you?"

"Here—at this hotel."

Without another word, Roland Packard started after the man in gray. Up Chapel Street went the man, with Roland not far behind.

The student was trying to think of some way to secure the message. He was desperate, and desperate schemes flitted through his brain. He thought of attacking the man on the street and trying to go through his pockets; but New Haven was thronged with visitors, old and young, and Packard found no opportunity, knowing full well that all chances of success were against him. Desperate though he was, he had no relish for arrest on the charge of assault and

robbery. But Roland's eyes were open, and he was on the watch for an opportunity. Still, something told him that the man was going directly to Merriwell, and he felt that his show of accomplishing his purpose was becoming smaller with every step.

Already preparations were being made for a hilarious time in the vicinity of Osborne Hall that night. Packard knew there would be speeches, cheering, red fire, and all that, but he gave it no thought now.

"All New Haven has gone daffy over Merriwell!" he muttered to himself, as he heard Frank's name spoken many times by passing men. "Anybody would think there was nothing else to talk of! Merriwell eclipses class day, senior prom, graduation, everything. Oh, if I could get a last crack at him right in the height of his glory! And to make five hundred plunks at the same time. I must do it somehow!"

But how?—that was the question. He ground his teeth as he saw his chances diminishing. The campus was reached, and the man in gray made directly for Vanderbilt.

"Going straight to Merriwell's room!" thought Roland. "Perhaps I'll have a chance on the stairs."

No one paid much attention to Packard. Everybody seemed hilariously happy. He was close behind the bearer of the message when that individual entered Vanderbilt; but the opportunity did not come. It

seemed that a perfect stream of men was making for Merriwell's room or coming from it.

"Just pouring congratulations on him," said the medic. "Oh, he's the king-pin here!"

He saw the messenger reach the door of Frank's room, which was standing wide open. Within that room there seemed to be a mass of happy students.

"No use!" grated Packard. "I didn't get a chance!"

Just then Oliver Packard and Hock Mason came out and descended the stairs. Neither of them observed Roland.

"He has been there," muttered Merry's enemy, looking after his twin brother, whom he so closely resembled in outward appearance, although otherwise there was not the slightest similarity.

Then a sudden thought came to him. In the past he had been mistaken for Oliver a score of times, and again he might perpetrate the deception. No one would expect him to boldly enter Merriwell's room. If any one had observed the departure of Oliver, it might be fancied that Oliver had returned, if Roland were seen.

"I'll do it!" he muttered, and he boldly followed the messenger into the room.

He saw Frank in the midst of his friends. He would have given ten years of his life to win such homage from that admiring throng. Yet he could not help

seeing that Frank Merriwell bore himself with perfect modesty, as if feeling himself no better than his humblest friend. Merry's position was most difficult, and only a man of remarkable tact could have filled it without seeming to pose. It was this atmosphere maintained by Frank at all times that had made him so popular. He did not betray exaltation, and yet in no way did he lower himself by his quiet, unaffected manners.

The man in gray slowly pushed forward till he could touch Frank's arm. In a moment when Merry was not engaged, the stranger spoke, saying:

"Mr. Merriwell, I beg your pardon for bothering you now, but my business is most important. I will trouble you only a minute, if you will kindly step aside."

Frank was surprised, but his courtesy was sufficient to enable him to betray it only by a slight lifting of the eyebrows. Then he excused himself to those immediately about him and stepped apart with the man.

"I would not have bothered you now," said the stranger, "but I am the bearer of an important message to you, and I wish to get it out of my hands without delay, as there is danger that I may lose it. I shall not feel easy till I have turned it over to you, when my task will be completed."

"A message?" said Frank. "From whom?"

"I do not know. I know nothing, save that I have been paid a large sum of money to bring it to you, and to guard it with my life till it is in your hands."

Such a statement as this was calculated to arouse interest.

"And you do not know whom the message is from?"

"I do not. It was not my place to make inquiries. All I know is that I have been pursued from Colorado to this city by a man who has seemed determined to rob me of it."

This added to the interest.

"But he did not succeed?"

"No, sir. I am here, and I have the message, which I will now hand over to you."

From an inner pocket the man took an oilskin envelope, which he gave to Frank, who looked at it curiously. On the envelope were traced these words:

"To Frank Harrison Merriwell; not to be opened until the day after he graduates from Yale."

The moment Frank saw that writing, which was wavering and unsteady, he uttered a little exclamation, his face paling.

"It's from my father!" he murmured. "I wonder what it can be!"

The messenger now presented a receipt for Frank to sign, having produced a fountain pen.

Merry signed the receipt, although for some reason which he himself did not fully understand his hand was not as steady as usual.

"There," said the man, "I thank goodness that my task is accomplished!"

"Who gave you this?" asked Frank.

"My chief."

"Your chief? You mean——"

"I am in the employ of the Great Western Detective Agency, of Denver, and my chief placed this in my hands. He stated that I was to receive two thousand dollars if I delivered it into your hands. He had been asked to name a man who was reliable, and I was chosen. The man who sent the message fixed the remuneration I was to receive. What he paid the chief I do not know."

Strange thoughts ran riot in Frank's brain. He had not heard from his father for some time, and he had not seen Mr. Merriwell since they parted in Florida. The last letter had assured Frank that his father was safe and comfortable, and, knowing the peculiarities of the man, he had not worried much for all of the period of silence. But now something told Merry that strange things were soon to happen.

"You have performed your duty well," said Merry, as he returned the pen to the man in gray.

"Thank you," said the stranger quietly. "And now I will bid you good-by."

Then he quietly departed, leaving the mysterious message, and Frank stood there studying the oilskin envelope, wondering what it contained. For the time he forgot his surroundings, forgot the friends who were present, forgot the triumphs of the day, and gave himself up to vain speculation.

His father was a most mysterious man, seldom doing anything in a conventional manner. Yet somehow it seemed to Merry that this did not account for the care and expense to which Mr. Merriwell had gone in order to have the message safely delivered into the hands of his son.

Of course Frank had no thought of opening that envelope before the time set—the day after graduation. He wondered if it could be that the envelope contained a check for a large sum of money which he was to use in starting out in a business career. Anyhow, it was certain, Merry thought, that the contents must be valuable.

He was not aware of a pair of greedy eyes fastened upon him. He was not aware of a person who moved cautiously toward him without attracting attention.

Roland Packard was desperate. The message had

been delivered, but as yet Merriwell knew nothing of its import. Packard reasoned that this was his last chance to earn that alluring five hundred dollars.

Reaching a favorable position, Roland glanced round toward the door, observing that, for the present, the coast was clear.

Then he turned, and, like a flash, his hand went out, his fingers closing on the envelope, which was snatched from Merriwell's grasp.

Without a word, without a sound, the desperate student leaped toward the door.

Merry, who had thought himself surrounded by friends, who to the last man were constant and true, had been taken utterly by surprise, but he quickly recovered.

"Stop, Packard!"

With that cry, he sprang after Roland, who was vanishing through the door. In a moment there was great excitement in the room.

Hans Dunnerwurst had seen the envelope snatched from Merry's fingers, and he tried to overtake Roland, shouting:

"Come away back mit dot! Id dit nod belonging to you!"

In his rush for the door he collided with Ephraim Gallup, who likewise had leaped after the thief, and

they went down heavily in the doorway, locked fast in each other's arms.

"Gol ding a fool!" spluttered the youth from Vermont.

Merry was compelled to leap over them both, which he did, dashing out after Packard. Half-way down the stairs Frank clutched Oliver, who was calmly returning to Merry's room.

"Give it up!" commanded Merry sternly.

Oliver was astounded.

"Give what up?" he asked.

"The message."

"What message?"

"You know. This is no time for joking, and it is a very poor joke, at best."

"Joke?" said Oliver wonderingly. "What are you talking about, Merriwell? I know nothing of any joke."

Frank held him off and looked at him sternly. Merry's friends were swarming to the head of the stairs.

"Frank's got him!" they cried.

"Yaw!" shouted Hans Dunnerwurst. "Dot vos der lobsder vot didded id! Holdt him onto, Vrankie!"

"Shut yeour maouth, yeou dinged Dutch chump!" came from Gallup. "Yeou come nigh fixin' it so he couldn't git him."

"Roight ye are, Gallup, me bhoy," put in Mulloy. "Thot Dutch chaze is foriver in th' way."

To the eyes of Merry the look of amazement on Oliver Packard's face seemed genuine.

"What has happened?" Oliver asked. "I heard the sudden commotion, and then you came leaping down here at me."

"Make him give it up, Merry!" cried the students above.

"I've got nothing to give up," protested Oliver, his face, which had turned pale, now flushing hotly. "What do they mean?"

Frank Merriwell was doing some swift thinking just then. He had not seen Oliver leave the room in company with Hock Mason, and he had not observed Roland's face fairly as the latter whirled with the snatched envelope in his grasp; but he realized that Oliver's actions in the past had stamped him as in no respect likely to perpetrate such a trick, while it was very much like his brother.

But it did not seem that Roland had been in the room. That he would dare come there in the midst of Merry's friends seemed utterly beyond reason, and not worthy of consideration. Yet Frank asked Oliver a question:

"Where is Roland?"

Again Oliver's face paled.

"Roland?" he said. "I don't know."

"Didn't he pass you just now on these stairs?"

"He did not."

Frank's face was hard and grim.

"Come up to my room," he commanded.

Oliver did not demur. He saw Frank's friends regarding him with looks of accusation, but, knowing he was not guilty of any wrong-doing, he quietly ascended the stairs and entered Merriwell's room.

At that moment, panting, yet trying to still his breathing and his thumping heart, Roland Packard was listening behind the closed door of another room near Merriwell's, into which he had darted. He had seen the door slightly ajar, and had leaped in there as he fled with the stolen message.

As Oliver, surrounded by Frank's friends, entered Merriwell's room, Roland opened the door the least bit and cautiously peered out. His ears had told him something of the truth, and he chuckled to think that his brother had appeared just in time to fall into the hands of the pursuers.

"He's all right," thought the young scoundrel. "And he turned up at just the right moment to divert suspicion from me long enough for me to get away. My last blow at Merriwell will be effective, and I'll make a ten-strike at the same time."

He saw Merriwell's door closed by some one who

meant to make sure that the captured suspect should not break away and escape. Then Roland stole swiftly out from the room and hastened down the stairs, chuckling with evil triumph.

Oliver Packard was in a bad scrape, and somehow his face seemed to indicate that he felt guilt. Still he persisted in being told what had happened. When he heard the story, he firmly said:

"This is a mistake, Merriwell—I swear it! I left this room ten or fifteen minutes ago in company with Hock Mason, as I can prove. I left Mason outside and came back. I was just in time for you to rush out and grasp me on the stairs. This is the truth, as Heaven hears me!"

There were murmurs of doubt on all sides. Many of Merry's friends had never trusted Oliver fully, being inclined to judge him by the conduct of his brother. Some of them had remonstrated with Frank for his friendliness with Oliver. These were the ones who now muttered their incredulity on listening to the words of the suspected student.

Oliver turned pale as he heard that muttering.

"Search him!" said somebody.

"Search him!" was the cry.

"Yes, search me!" panted Oliver. "I demand to be searched!"

"No," said Frank, as his hand fell on Oliver's shoul-

der. "I believe you! I am satisfied that you speak the truth. It is a mistake."

"But we saw him with the envelope in his hand," said Dade Morgan.

"It was not I!" asserted Oliver.

"No, it was not you," agreed Merriwell, "but it was one who hates me and who looks so much like you that we were all deceived."

"My brother!" muttered Oliver huskily.

"It must have been," nodded Frank. "He has stolen that message, which is of great value to me."

"Merriwell," exclaimed Oliver Packard excitedly, "I'll recover the message for you! Trust me to get it. I will restore it to you, if I live!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE FALSE MESSAGE.

Roland Packard was exultant as he hastily left Vanderbilt. Safe in his pocket was the precious message.

"I have it! I have it!" he laughed, as he hastened away. "Oh, that was a piece of luck! Let Oll fight it out with them. He'll get off somehow, and they never can prove I did it."

He seemed utterly regardless of the shame and humiliation he had cast upon his brother by his rascally act. Having sunk lower and lower, Roland's conscience no longer gave him much trouble, no matter what he did.

"Five hundred dollars!" he muttered. "All mine! That will clear me of every debt."

He was hastening to find Anton Mescal, when, of a sudden, he stopped.

"If that man is willing to pay five hundred dollars for this message the old envelope must contain something of great importance."

That set him to thinking, and soon he softly exclaimed:

"I'd like to know what is in that envelope! It

might be worth much more than five hundred dollars to me."

He was on Chapel Street, opposite the green. Glancing around to make sure he was not watched, he took the envelope from his pocket and examined it.

"Sealed!" he muttered, in disappointment. "Too bad! But for that, I might——"

He grew silent, examining the seal.

"This is luck!" he finally laughed. "The seal was struck with a ring made to represent the symbol of one of the old freshman societies. The man who struck that seal may have received the ring from Merriwell himself. I know where to find another ring exactly like that."

Packard thrust the envelope into his pocket and hastened straight to a jeweler's shop, where he soon purchased a ring which he knew would strike a seal exactly like the one on the envelope.

From the jeweler's store he went to a stationer's, where he purchased a stick of sealing-wax like the wax used on the oilskin envelope.

Then came the hardest thing to obtain, an envelope like the one in his pocket; but, after much search, Packard secured just what he wanted.

"Now, I am going to know what the message is!" he exulted.

At first he started for his own room, but he did not go far.

"Oliver may be there," he thought, "or he may come before the job is done. I must not go there."

In a moment he thought of a place, and then he proceeded straight to a little club-room, where some of the reckless Yale men often gathered to play cards.

The club-room was deserted now, as everybody seemed out to take part in the gay time that night. Roland knew there was little danger that he would be disturbed, for it was not probable that any Yale man would care to play cards on such a night.

The place had been lighted by ordinary kerosene-lamps, and Roland had one of these burning in short order. Then he set to work to open the envelope. At first his hands trembled, which caused him to stop and wait for his nerves to become steadier. He took a silver flask from his pocket, unscrewed the cap, and drank from it.

"There!" he said; "that will fix me."

Slowly and cautiously he worked with his knife, removing the seal from the envelope. When this was done he found some trouble in opening the flap without leaving a trace, but the task was accomplished at last.

"Now!" he exclaimed, his face flushed and his eyes

gleaming, "we'll see what this great message is all about!"

From the envelope he took several sheets of parchmentlike paper, which were covered with writing. Then, by the light of the lamp, he settled himself to read the message that had never been intended for other eyes than those of Frank Merriwell.

As Packward read he showed signs of surprise. At first he whistled softly, then he uttered an exclamation, and at last he exclaimed aloud:

"Well, by Jove! this is interesting!"

When he had finished reading, he started up, exclaiming:

"Frank Merriwell's fate is in my hands! Almighty goodness! What a ten-strike! With the aid of this I can turn him out into the world a pauper! Roland Packard, this is the greatest piece of work you ever did. Five hundred dollars! Why, this is worth five million dollars!"

He was wildly excited, and could hardly repress wild shouts of joy. Indeed, he executed a savage dance of exultation.

"At last!" he panted. "Now I am able to obtain revenge for every injury Merriwell has done me! Oh, but my revenge will be a sweet one!"

The rascal was so excited and interested that he

again read the wonderful message from beginning to end.

"Now," he said, "to fool Mescal first. He must pay me the five hundred, for I need it."

There was some writing-paper on a table near. He took several sheets, folded them, and thrust them into the envelope from which the message had been removed. Then he stuck down the flap with care and brought out his sealing-wax and the ring he had purchased.

Removing the chimney from the lamp, he heated the wax in the flame and dropped it on exactly the spot where the original seal had been. At the proper time he pressed the ring on the wax, and an exact reproduction of the first seal was made.

Packard surveyed his work with pride, examining it closely to see if a casual observer could detect that the envelope had been tampered with.

"It's all right," he decided. "I'll defy anybody to tell that it has been opened. Oh, I'm a clever devil! Mr. Merriwell is in the midst of his glory now, but he shall go out from Yale a beggar! If he only knew! Some time he shall know. When it is too late, I'll tell him all, and that shall be my triumph."

Then he set about fixing the other envelope, into which he placed the message, sticking down the flap and putting on the seal.

"All that is necessary is to soil it a little," he said. "Then it will be exactly like the original. No—by George, no!"

He had turned the original envelope and seen the writing upon it.

"Well," muttered the fellow, after a few moments. "I'm rather clever at imitating handwriting, so I'll see what I can do in this case."

Finding pen and ink, he set about the task. At first he imitated on a sheet of paper the writing on the original envelope. The first trial was not perfectly satisfactory, so he made another attempt.

"There," he said, as he examined it, "if I can do as well as that on the envelope it will be a first-class job."

Without delay he set at work on the envelope, and the result was greatly to his liking.

"It's all right," he decided, as he blotted it. "I believe it would fool Merriwell himself."

He destroyed the sheet on which he had been practising, and then placed the envelope containing the message in his pocket, where it would be safe.

"Now to get the five hundred!" he laughed, as he picked up the other envelope. "Hamlet's ghost! but won't Mr. Anton Mescal be hot under the collar when he opens this and finds nothing but blank paper in it!"

There was a slight sound at the door. A key turned

in the lock, and Packard leaped to his feet, turning in time to see the door swing open. Quick as a flash, he thrust the envelope into his pocket.

Oliver Packard stepped into the room.

"You?" exclaimed Roland.

"Yes!" said Oliver.

He stepped in, closed the door, and locked it.

"Why the devil are you here?" snarled Roland.

"To find you," said Oliver quietly.

"What do you want of me?"

"I want that message."

"What message?"

"The one you snatched from Merriwell."

"What ails you? Are you nutty?"

"Hand it over!" commanded Oliver.

"You go die!" sneered Roland. "You're silly."

"I am here to take it, and I shall," declared Oliver.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"What did you put in your pocket just as I entered?"

"None of your business!"

"I know what it was."

"Then if you know so much, why do you ask me?"

"It was the message."

"What are you giving me about a message?"

"It's no use to play innocent with me, Roll."

Roland uttered a savage exclamation.

"You get out of here!" he cried, taking a step.

Oliver did not stir.

"I'll go when you give me what I am after," he said.

"I'll give it to you—in the neck!"

"Roll," said Oliver quietly, "you can't bluff me. I know you snatched a message from Frank Merriwell's hand to-night, and you have it with you. I was accused, but Merriwell believed me on my word of honor."

"That's more than he would me," said Roland, with a harsh laugh.

"You have only yourself to blame if no one will believe your word of honor," said Oliver.

"Sermon, is it?" cried the other. "You're always preaching nowadays, Oll."

"It's no sermon now, for I have no time to waste."

"I'm glad of it. Get out and let me alone."

"I shall not go till I get what I came for. I will clear myself of suspicion, and I will restore to Merriwell what rightfully belongs to him."

"You've tackled a big job."

"I shall do it."

"How?"

"Somehow—anyhow. You have disgraced me time and again, Roll, and I have stood it for mother's sake. She loves you more than she does me, and——"

"Oh, cut it out! You've told me this before."

"But for me you would have broken her heart already."

"Good little Oliver! he was his mammy's precious boy!" mocked Roll. "Oh, you make me sick!"

"You know what I say is true. But for me you would have been expelled in disgrace before this. I have saved you when Frank Merriwell was ready to punish you for your wrong-doing. How have you repaid me! To-day you have done something that has filled me with intense shame and humiliation. Yet I do not believe you care a snap."

"What's the use?"

"Ingrate!" panted Oliver, aroused.

"Bah!" returned the other, snapping his fingers.

Oll advanced into the room, his eyes flashing.

"Before this I have shouldered the blame that you should have taken," he cried. "Your actions have caused me to be dropped by my best friends, with the exception of Merriwell. Your actions caused me to lose my chance of making the nine again this year. I have endured all that I can. The limit is reached."

"Now what?"

"I'm going to cut clear from you."

"I'm glad of it!"

"But first I am going to restore that stolen message to Merriwell."

"Are you?"

"Yes."

"Well, go ahead."

Roland was defiant.

"Give it to me!" panted Oliver, his hands clenched, while he trembled in every limb. "I demand it!"

"Well, you'll have to demand. You won't get it."

"You can't get out without giving it to me, Roll," asserted Oliver grimly, as he now advanced upon his brother.

"What do you think you are going to do?" demanded the young rascal. "Don't make an idiot of yourself!"

Oliver clutched his brother by the collar.

"Give it up!" he commanded. "I'll take it if I have to strip your clothes off to do so."

Roland laughed defiantly. Then he suddenly broke Oliver's hold and struck the hand of his brother aside.

A moment later Oliver flew at Roland with terrible fury, grasping him by the throat.

Then began a desperate encounter between the brothers. Roland found Oliver desperate and determined. For at least ten minutes they fought, and at last Oliver had thrown his brother to the floor and pinned him there. Then he thrust his hand into Roland's pocket

and drew out the envelope that the youthful villain had prepared to deceive Anton Mescal.

"I have it!" exclaimed Oliver triumphantly.

"Well, keep it!" grated Roland, inwardly delighted over the fact that the message was safe and Oliver was deceived. "Let me up! You ought to be satisfied."

Having put the letter in his pocket, Oliver quickly leaped to his feet and backed away, saying:

"I am satisfied in getting the message, but I'd had it even though you had forced me to kill you!"

"You're a nice one!" snapped Roland, sitting up. "You're a fine brother to have!"

"I can return the compliment with interest. But never again will I shoulder any of your wrong-doing, Roland. If you get into a bad scrape in the future through your actions, you must not look to me for assistance."

"Oh, I won't! Don't worry about that. After to-night we are no longer brothers! You are my enemy!"

"I have been your best friend. You have made your choice by your conduct."

Oliver had retreated to the door, still watching Roland, who now laughed and said:

"Get out if you want to; I sha'n't try to stop you. I'll not fight again over that old message. I don't believe it amounts to anything, anyhow."

Oliver unlocked the door cautiously, for he did not trust Roland, even then.

"I shall tell Merriwell the truth," he said, "and I shall not ask him to let you off without punishment, as I have in the past. He may punish you or not, as he chooses. If he does not, it will be because he is the soul of generosity."

Then he opened the door and disappeared quickly, closing it behind him.

Roland Packard laughed in noiseless triumph.

"Go it, you fool!" he whispered. "I have the message, and you have nothing but an envelope containing a lot of blank paper. I'd like to see Merriwell's face when he opens that envelope!"

CHAPTER V.

CELEBRATION OF THE OLD GRADS.

The celebration was in progress. Frank Merriwell, with Inza Burrage at his side, was watching the fun from Vanderbilt. Frank's heart was troubled because of the loss of the message, but his face was smiling.

The class of 'Umpty-six was celebrating its silver-wedding. Twenty-five years had passed since these hilarious old grads received their sheepskins. They were back in force, and they had set out to make things lively.

The great dinner at Heibs' was over. But, unless one eats the dinner, what profit to describe it. So the class of 'Umpty-six made merry on this occasion of hilarious good cheer. After twenty-five years the class had returned to dear old Yale, dined in the shadow of her buildings, and drunk often and lovingly to the memory of bygone days.

A band awaited those sons of 'Umpty-six outside the door. The toasts were over, so that now they were ready to start upon their night of fun. What though their hair is streaked with gray! What though

some are bewhiskered to the eyes! Have they not left dignity, business cares, and such minor matters at home?

The band struck up, "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow." The 'Umpty-sixers came out of Heibs', arm in arm. They caught up the song, and, in full blare, the band moved toward Chapel Street, the grads following. They turn into Chapel Street, which, even at this hour, is brilliantly lighted, for no one thinks of sleep to-night. And thus they move toward Osborne Hall.

On that corner, where is now the sober recitation hall, for half a century stood the old Yale fence, the focus of college life, the scene of storied struggles, the theater of evening glees, the symbol of happy days at Yale.

But now the old fence is gone. However, nothing will do for these old grads but that a substitute, propped up by iron supports, must be set in front of Osborn, and thither the jolly old 'Umpty-sixers direct their course.

"To the fence! Clear the road! Let off the red fire! Turn loose the sky-rockets and Roman candles, and cram the night full of blooming noise!"

Up Chapel Street they come in a flare of colored fire, with the rockets hissing skyward, the Roman candles popping aloft their gleaming balls of colored

flame, while torpedoes and giant crackers add to the racket.

The windows of the New Haven House are filled with women and pretty girls who had been watching the hilarious crowd of grads across the street all the evening. This is a new and wild scene to them, and now, when they behold the 'Umpty-sixers come singing and dancing up to the fence, not a few are more than ever impressed by the fact that it is a dangerous thing to turn a Yale graduate loose on old New Haven town upon the occasion of one of his class reunions.

"'Umpty-sixers, take the fence!" goes up the cry.

There follows a rush of the old fellows, all eager to gain a place on the fence.

Then the band plays all the old college songs, and for several hours to come these hilarious old graybeards will bawl and howl to the strains of the band.

But 'Umpty-six is not the only class mixed up in this general blow-out. Other and younger classes are there, back for occasions of lesser significance than the silver-wedding. Nearly a thousand Yale men are surging about Osborn corner, which is kept brilliantly lighted by the glare of Egyptian red lights. Judging by the deafening noise, it would seem that the entire stock of fireworks in the city must have been

set off already. But they will keep coming in wagon-loads.

And in the midst of all this tumultuous rejoicing the man who has won for Yale the baseball championship of the season is not forgotten.

"Long cheer for Merriwell!" shrieks an 'Umpty-sixer.

Then the whole vast crowd of Yale men pause to roar out the cheer for a Yale man who to-night is more famous than all others.

No wonder that Merriwell himself felt a thrill. No wonder some of his friends laughed while their eyes were dimmed with tears.

And on his arm was the pressure of a hand—the hand of the girl he loved. And at his side was a radiantly beautiful girl, who felt that on this day of his glory her joy must be even greater than his.

Hans Dunnerwurst was sobbing.

"Whut in thunder is the matter with yeou?" blurted Ephraim Gallup, giving the Dutch youth a punch.

"I don'd knew vot id vos," answered Hans, "but I veel like I vos peing tickled a fedder by till I couldn't stood him no longer alretty."

"Begorra! Oi fale loike Oi'd nivver get over it!" said Barney Mulloy. "Oi'll drame av this fer a year."

Elsie is there. She is saying nothing, but the joy in her blue eyes speaks. She looks at Frank as

that mighty cheer for him rolls up to the rocket-riven sky. She sees Inza's hand on Frank's arm, and then —then she turns to Hodge.

Bart, once called selfish, feels that he is far happier than he would be were those men cheering for him. A good, true friend Bart had been, and in this hour there is nothing of envy in his heart.

Why should there be? Elsie was beside him, and, somehow, he felt that for all of Frank's great glory, for all of bewildering, dark-eyed Inza, he—Bart—had won the prize of prizes.

"Speech!" shouted an 'Umpty-sixer, as the cheering subsided.

"Speech! Speech!" roared the others.

"Speech by Billy Bilton, the only and original windmill of 'Umpty-six!" cried an old grad. "Put him up—put him in the wagon with the fireworks! Shoot off your face, Billy! Billy Bilton!"

"Billy Bilton! 'Umpty-six!" roared the crowd.

Billy Bilton was the Honorable William P. Bilton, representative in Congress for the great and glorious Commonwealth of Maine. Billy smiled, and that smile was something worth beholding! He removed the cigar from his mouth and held it between his fingers.

"My contemporaries," he began, pointing with the cigard toward the fireworks in the wagon, "have been

doing such good work that I feel handicapped. But I want to say that the greatest thing in this great university on this great night, next to the great class of 'Umpty-six, is the great Frank Merriwell!"

Then they cheered again.

"Now," said Billy, when he could again be heard, "I want to tell you what Frank Merriwell has done for Yale. He has made for her the proudest athletic record of any college in the country. Since the day that he was placed in command not one important game has been taken from us. It was he who arose in time to lift Yale from the slough of despond into which she had fallen, and it was he who has led her to the dazzling heights of glory where she now stands. That's not all. While he has uplifted Yale he has risen himself, until to-day he is known from the broad Atlantic to the blue Pacific. Yea, wherever the flag of our country floats, the glorious Stars and Stripes, there has spread the name and fame and glory of Merriwell, of Yale."

It was impossible for him to continue until they had cheered again.

"Even to foreign lands his glory has spread," the speaker went on. "Wherever the English language is spoken the name of Merriwell may be heard. From the Klondike to Patagonia, from the Philippines to South Africa, he is known and admired and rev-

erenced as the model American youth. Old men commend him to the young, the young try to model after him, and even the child at its mother's knee lisps the name of Merriwell."

"Oh, say!" muttered Frank; "he's putting it on too thick! I can't stand this!"

But Billy was ready to switch now, although he had no thought of stopping. He waved his hand, and sparks flew from his glowing cigar.

"Now," he shouted, "I want to tell you what 'Umpty-six has done for Yale. 'Umpty-six is the greatest class that ever graduated from Yale!" he declared, with another wild gesture that caused him to drop his cigar. "'Umpty-six is——"

Bang—barked a cannon cracker in the wagon.

"'Umpty-six——"

Bang! bang! bang!

A series of terrible explosions set William to dancing in a lively manner, for his fallen cigar had ignited the fireworks in the wagon.

The horse attached to the wagon was frightened and broke away, despite all efforts to hold him.

Immediately the Honorable William lost his footing and fell upon his knees in the wagon, while away pranced the horse at a mad gallop. The orator was kneeling in the midst of a pyrotechnic display of hissing Roman candles, flaming red lights, bursting cannon

crackers, and screaming rockets. Jack Ready afterward declared that it was a grand and awe-inspiring spectacle.

"There goes Windy Billy!" shouted the crowd, and every man, to the last one, started after the blazing wagon and the most startling piece of set fireworks ever seen in New Haven, which was long remembered by the name of "The American Representative in All His Glory."

As the wagon disappeared Frank Merriwell, who was laughing at the astonishing climax, felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned and saw Oliver Packard.

"I have found you at last," said Packard. "I've been hunting for you more than two hours."

"I have been right here all along," said Frank. "What do you want, Oliver?"

"I have brought it," was the triumphant answer, as Packard put his hand into his pocket and drew out the sealed oilskin envelope. "Here it is, Merriwell."

"Good!" exclaimed Merry, in great satisfaction, as he immediately thrust it into his pocket. "I'll take care it is not snatched from me again. I'll ask you no questions, Oliver, and I'll not forget what you have done."

CHAPTER VI.

ANTON MESCAL STRIKES.

Roland Packard had fancied he might be forced to destroy the original oilskin envelope in removing the message from it, and for that reason he had secured a duplicate. When he succeeded in getting the message out without destroying the original envelope, he decided that the best thing to do was to place the blank paper in that same envelope, as the clean newness of the other might betray the trick. Then he was seized by a desire to put the message in the other envelope and copy as accurately as possible the writing upon it, which he did.

The villainous student chuckled gleefully as he thought how his brother had been deceived.

"I have the message safe in my pocket," he muttered, "while Oll is taking the fake to Merriwell. But must I give up this genuine article in order to get the five hundred from Mescal?"

He was not at all pleased by the thought. In fact, he quickly decided not to give up the message, if he could help it. He set to thinking the matter over, and it was not long before he had decided on his course of action. He left the club-room and skulked away

to his own room, taking care to attract as little attention as possible.

The following morning Roland secured another oil-skin envelope. Knowing Oliver would be off to the exercises of the day, he sought his own room and prepared the envelope there.

When he came out the seniors, in caps and gowns, were assembling at the chapel, into which a crowd of visitors was flowing.

"Merriwell will be there in all his glory!" muttered Packard to himself. "He will be the cynosure of all eyes. Oh, he'll feel proud and fine, but little he'll dream that it is my hand that will send him forth from Yale a pauper."

The chapel was thronged with visitors when the exercises began, and Packard was right in thinking that Merriwell would be the center of attraction.

In the meantime Packard had sought Anton Mescal, whom he finally found in a room at the Tontine. Mescal had a bottle of wine on the table at his elbow, and was smoking a Spanish cigarette. His face was flushed and his eyes gleamed wolfishly when Roland entered. He did not rise, but regarded the student grimly.

"I've come," said Packard, with an air of triumph.

"I see you have," said Mescal coldly, showing his white teeth after the manner of a wolf.

"You do not appear glad to see me."

"But I am glad—very glad," said the man from the West, in a very singular way.

Packard paused, and a shiver ran over him. There was something deadly in the atmosphere.

"Sit down," invited Mescal, in that same awesome manner, making a slight gesture toward a chair.

"I had a hard time getting the message," began Packard awkwardly.

"Then you did get it?" asked Mescal.

"Yes. When I set out to do a thing, I have a way of doing it. But you do not seem much pleased."

"I am pleased—very pleased. Go on. How did you get it?"

"I went straight to Merriwell's room in the tracks of the man you bade me follow."

"To Merriwell's room?"

"Yes. I could not get a chance to tackle the fellow and secure the message. You know the streets were full."

"Yes."

"If I had tackled him on the street I must have failed, and I would have been lodged in the jug."

"Possibly. Go on."

The manner of the Westerner had not changed in the least, and Roland felt that those daggerlike eyes were piercing him through and through.

"Merriwell's room was packed with his friends, who were there to congratulate him. I walked right in after the messenger."

"Very bold of you!"

"The messenger took the message from his pocket and handed it over to Merriwell."

"And you?"

"I was near enough to spring forward and snatch it from Merriwell's hand."

"But you did not?"

"I did! I snatched it and fled. I eluded the pursuers and got away with it. Of course, they were searching for me last night, so I was compelled to lay low. But I am here now."

"And you have the message?"

"I have."

Mescal rose to his feet, and the look on his face seemed to become more dangerous than ever.

"Where is it?"

"Here," said Packard, also rising.

From his pocket he took the fake envelope, which he held in his hand.

"Give me the five hundred dollars," he demanded. "It is yours the moment you pay me the money."

Mescal stepped clear of the table, and by a sudden spring placed himself between Packard and the door. He was like a panther in his movements.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Roland, in alarm. "What are you doing? Don't think for a moment that you can take the message from me without paying the money."

"You fool!" said Mescal, in a low tone. "You liar! You traitor!"

Packard saw there was trouble in the air. He wondered if in any manner this man could have discovered his trick.

"What do you mean by calling me such names?" he blustered.

"I mean just what I have said; you are a fool, a liar, and a traitor. You came here to deceive me!"

"To deceive you?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"With that thing!" said the man, pointing at the oilskin envelope. "It does not contain the message!"

Packard was astounded, but he resolved to make a good bluff.

"What are you saying?" he exclaimed, pretending to be much astonished. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that I know your game to beat me out of five hundred dollars! I mean that I was watching you last night! I mean that I saw you when you went to Merriwell and gave the message to him with your own hand!"

Roland gasped.

"Went to him—and gave him—the message?" he faltered. "Why, man, you are——" Then he paused, uttering a little cry, as a sudden light broke on him.

It was Oliver this fellow had watched! It was Oliver he had seen give the fake envelope to Merriwell!

"You are mistaken," he said swiftly, although he could not quite see how he was going to make things clear. "I have a twin brother who looks exactly like me. You saw him."

For one moment Mescal seemed surprised, and then a dangerous laugh came from his lips.

"And what was your twin brother doing with the message?" he demanded.

Roland choked and hesitated. That hesitation seemed to fan the man to a burst of fury.

"Fool!" he hissed, crouching. "You have tried to deceive the wrong man! Had you known me better you would not have done so! In my body flows the blood of the Spaniard, and I never forgive an injury! You betrayed me, and I will settle with you as we settle such scores in the West!"

Out flashed a slender dagger in his hand. Roland uttered a cry of fear as Mescal leaped upon him. The student tried to defend himself, but Mescal's blade rose and fell.

"You devil!" gasped Packard. "You have stabbed me."

Then, as Roland sank to his knees, Mescal broke away, flung the blood-stained dagger on the floor, and bounded to the door. One backward look he took as he disappeared, seeing the bleeding youth upon the floor.

Then he fled from the hotel and from New Haven.

Packard was not fatally wounded. The dagger had pierced the muscle of his arm, and the point had pentrated his side as far as a rib. The wound in the arm was the most painful, and the other was not dangerous. In the hospital Roland was skilfully treated, but he persistently refused to tell how or by whom he had been wounded.

Nor would he stay in the hospital when he found that his wound was not at all dangerous if properly cared for He came out that afternoon and returned to the college.

He found the afternoon exercises on the campus taking place. The place was like an open arena, with temporary seats rising in tiers all round it. Those seats were packed with human beings, spectators and friends of the students. Already the classes had marched in, led by the band, and assembled on the benches in the middle of the arena, where they now sat sedately smoking long clay pipes and wearing caps

and gowns. They were listening to the historians of the class, who were reading the class histories.

Packard looked on, feeling that something was occurring in which he had no part and no interest. His arm was in a sling, and this last enemy of Merriwell at Yale looked a forlorn and wretched figure.

The histories read by the different historians had been full of hits upon the various members of the class. As a man's name was called his companions lifted him upon their shoulders, while his history was given to the strained ears of the gathering. He was compelled to submit gracefully, but some of those sharp hits caused the victims to look like fresh-boiled lobsters.

The historian was reading when Packard reached a spot where he could see and hear. Bruce Browning was held aloft upon the shoulders of his fellows. When it was finished, Browning was lowered, and up came Bart Hodge as his name was mentioned.

"Merriwell's friends!" muttered Packard bitterly. "Everybody seems to be Merriwell's friend to-day. I'm the only one of the whole howling pack who has remained his enemy. He has conquered them all, but I'll conquer him!"

Then Hodge was lowered. There was a stir. The name of Merriwell came from the lips of the historian. Instantly something remarkable took place. Merry

was lifted and held aloft, but every man on these benches rose to his feet. It was a tribute to Frank, and the great crowd of watching spectators caught the feeling. Up rose that mass of men and women and youths and girls in one great surge, standing for the moment to do honor to the most famous college man in the world. It was a spectacle never forgotten at Yale.

Then those students who were not holding Frank aloft sat down, and the spectators followed their example.

The historian, his voice ringing out clear and strong, delivered a blood-stirring eulogy on Merriwell.

"Bah!" muttered Packard, and, sick at heart, he slunk away, unwilling to listen to those words of adulation for one he hated with undying intensity.

Late that afternoon, when the exercises were all over, Oliver Packard found Roland in the room they had occupied together. Oliver was surprised when he saw his brother's arm in a sling, and he asked what had happened.

"None of your business!" answered Roland surlily.

"You are hurt?" exclaimed Oliver, forgetting that he had vowed he would take no further interest in his wayward brother. "What is it, Roll! Won't you tell me how badly you are hurt?"

"Go to the devil!" snarled Roland.

Oliver sat down, a look of sadness on his face. For some time he sat in silence; but he spoke at last.

"Where were you while the exercises were taking place to-day?" he asked.

"That's my business," said Roland.

"You should have been there. If you had, it's possible your arm would not be in a sling now. Roland, I have returned the message to Merriwell, and I feel that he will take no action against you. I did not ask him not to do so, for I have been forced to ask him so many times before that I was ashamed."

"Then I owe you no thanks."

"No; but you do owe him something. Is the last spark of honor and the last particle of justice driven from your heart? Can't you see where you have placed yourself by your conduct toward this man, who to-day has been honored as no Yale man ever before was honored?"

"Honored by fools!" growled Roland.

"Honored by the wisest men in college! Honored by every one! If you had seen every person in that great crowd on the campus rise when his name was spoken by the historian——"

"I did see it, and then I got away."

"Then you were there? But you were not in your place."

"If I had been, they would have seen that one

college man did not rise when Merriwell's name was called."

"And you would have brought on yourself the scorn of every one. Can't you see that by his generosity, his fine character, and manliness, he has risen far above you?"

"No! I see that he has a trick of fooling everybody but me. He can make his enemies forget that they were once enemies, but I am not like the others. I want to tell you something, Oll. You think Merriwell has triumphed, but you are wrong. I am the one who has triumphed, though no one save myself knows it. Some time Merriwell shall know, and then he will realize that one of his enemies was more than a match for him."

"What do you mean?" asked Oliver, amazed. "Are you crazy?"

"Never mind what I mean, but I speak the truth. I have triumphed, and Merriwell is my victim. I'll talk no more about it, so you may as well close your face."

And Oliver could get nothing further from his brother.

CHAPTER VII

THE END COMES.

The day of graduation came. The sun shone bright and clear on this great day in the life of Frank Merriwell, but still that feeling of sadness was lingering in his heart, for he felt that he was bidding farewell to his dear home.

Frank had competed to be a Townsend teacher, and he had been chosen one of the fortunate six who were to speak for the DeForest gold medal.

Thus it happened that he was given little time for thought and little in which to see his friends, all of whom were eager to be in his company.

Had he known that the oilskin envelope in his possession contained nothing but blank paper it is not probable he could have spoken as brilliantly as he did.

When the speaking was over it was generally conceded that the handsome medal must go to Merriwell.

The faculty adjourned to the Treasury building, and there Frank was awarded the splendid prize. Each member of the faculty shook his hand in turn and spoke some word of praise to him. They looked on him lovingly, for they knew that he had done more

to raise the standard of college life than any other student in the country.

Frank was on his way to his room when he almost collided with Roland Packard.

Packard had been drinking heavily, and he stopped, his lip curling in a scornful sneer.

"You think you're it, Merriwell," he said, in a tone of great contempt; "but, if you only knew it, you are the biggest fool alive."

Frank had no desire to exchange words with the fellow.

"You're drunk, Packard," he said quietly.

"You're a liar, Merriwell!" snarled Packard, who seemed not to have a single remnant of reason left.

Frank was not in the habit of taking the lie from anybody, but now, seeing Packard's arm in a sling, he did not heed the fellow's insult.

"Your friends think you're a great gun," Roland went on; "but you really are mighty small potatoes. Won the DeForest prize, did you? Well, you may have to pawn it soon to get bread to keep you from starving!"

This did not have the effect Roland had fancied it might, which angered him to a still further expression of rage.

"Oh, you're mighty cool; but you won't be so cool when you find you're a beggar! And you are! I

know what I'm talking about. You will find it out in time, and I want to tell you now that it is I—I, Roland Packard, whom you despise, who has made you a beggar! Don't forget it!"

He wheeled and walked swiftly away.

Frank stood still and looked after the fellow.

"I wonder what he meant," Merry muttered, a feeling of uneasiness in his breast. "Is he plumb daffy? I know he's pretty drunk, but still it seems that he must have some reason left."

Frank was troubled despite himself, and he hurried to his room, where he made sure the oilskin envelope was still safe in his possession.

Packard had hurried away to drink still more. Already he was half-crazed by liquor, but he felt consumed by a burning fire that called for more, more, more.

The afternoon of graduation-day came and saw all graduating students in caps and gowns, headed by the faculty, likewise garbed, march to the music of a band out of the campus and down Elm Street to the green, which they crossed, turning up Chapel Street to Vanderbilt. The gates of Vanderbilt are opened but once a year, always on this occasion, and through the gates they marched, under the arch and across the campus. The chapel was entered, and then came the last solemn ceremony of conferring the degrees.

Frank thrilled when he stood up to receive his sheepskin. There was a choking in his throat, his sensation was a mingled feeling of joy and sorrow that was like exquisite pain. His face was pale as marble. When the certificate was placed in his hand he felt that it was the document that divorced him from dear old Yale, and he sat down with his teeth clenched to hold back the moan that sought vent.

It was over!

That afternoon a man was seen reeling over the Barnesville bridge. He was intoxicated, and he seemed to fancy he was pursued by an enemy or enemies who sought his life. Filled with mad terror, he climbed upon the railing not far from the eastern end of the bridge and flung himself headlong into the river.

Several persons had seen this crazy act, and they rushed to rescue him, if possible. Two men pulled out in a boat toward the spot where he had last been seen. As they pulled he rose to the surface, made a few feeble splashes, and sank.

One of the men stripped off his coat and plunged in. He brought the drowning fellow up, helped the other man get him into the boat, crawled in himself, and they pulled ashore.

On the shore men worked nearly an hour over the poor wretch, but all their efforts were unavailing. He was dead. In his pocket they found some letters,

which told them he was a student and that his name was Roland Packard.

And thus it came about that in the pocket of his dead brother Oliver Packard found another envelope that looked exactly like the one Roland had snatched from Merriwell. He was astonished and puzzled, but he took it to Merriwell.

"One of them must contain the message, Merriwell," said Oliver, whose face was marked with deep sorrow.

"To-morrow will tell," said Frank, "for then I will open them both." He took Oliver's hand. "I am very sorry, Packard," he said.

"It is for the best," declared Oliver; but his chin quivered as he turned away.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MESSAGE STOLEN AGAIN.

"The time has come!"

The words came from the lips of Frank Merriwell, who was standing beside a small table in a room of one of New York's big hotels. In his hand he held the two oilskin envelopes. Across each envelope had been written:

"To Frank Merriwell; to be opened the day after he graduates from Yale."

Frank had studied the writing on those envelopes, and he was convinced that the words on one had been imitated and copied from the other.

Bart Hodge was Merry's companion, sitting near and showing no small amount of interest in the singular envelopes.

"Which contains the message?" was the question that came from Bart's lips.

"That is a conundrum," admitted Frank, as he gazed from one to the other.

"This is the one Oliver Packard returned that night the old grads were celebrating on Osborne corner."

"Which one is that, the original or the fake?"

"The original."

"Then what do you make of it?"

"I believe it does not contain the message. I believe the original envelope was opened by Roland Packard."

"Why did he do that?"

"I don't know, unless he expected he would have to give up something and was determined to hang on to the real message. I am convinced that there was somebody behind Roland Packard. He was not working on his own hook. The messenger was pursued all the way from Colorado to New Haven by a man who seemed determined to do him injury. That man failed, but is it not possible he instigated the action of Roland Packard?"

"And you think the stranger employed him to get hold of the message?"

"I have arrived at that belief."

"Still, that does not explain the fake envelope."

"It seems to me that Roland Packard's curiosity was aroused and he determined to find out what the original envelope contained. He opened it. In fact, having studied and examined this envelope closely, I think I can detect indications that it has been broken open."

"Then it is likely that Oliver Packard did not restore to you the message, after all."

"Not in this first envelope, but you know he brought

me this other, which was taken from the body of his dead brother."

"Then it is possible that the second envelope is the one that contains the message."

"Yes," nodded Frank. "I almost dread to open it, although the time to do so has come. Something seems to whisper that it contains a great surprise for me."

Frank sat down beside the table, and, with a firm hand, tore open the envelope he regarded as the original. An exclamation escaped his lips as he drew forth the contents.

"Look, Bart!" he cried. "I was right! Nothing but blank paper!"

He held the unsoiled sheets up before the eyes of his almost breathless companion.

"By Jove! you were right!" said Hodge. "You have a way of figuring things out correctly, Merriwell. The other envelope must contain the message."

But, strange to say, Merriwell seemed to hesitate again.

"What if it should not!" he muttered. "What if that also contains nothing but blank paper!"

"But it must contain the message!" exclaimed Bart.

"Why?"

"Because—because the message was not in this one."

"A poor reason, Bart. It's likely this envelope was fixed to deceive the man who employed Roland Packard to secure the message. I presume that man offered Packard money to get the message and turn it over to him. Packard's curiosity was aroused, and he decided to find out what the message contained, which led him to remove it from the envelope. Then he fixed up the original envelope to deceive the man who had paid him to do the crooked work, but his brother took it from him in the fight. Following that it is likely that he fixed up this other envelope for the purpose of fooling his rascally employer. In such a case, it is almost certain that envelope No. 2 contains blank paper, the same as the first."

"Open it!" panted Hodge.

"That will settle it," said Frank, as he did so.

Bart was rigid as a marble image as Merry drew the contents of the envelope forth.

From Frank's lips came a sigh of satisfaction.

"It is the message!" he said.

Had he not been so preoccupied, so absorbed, Frank Merriwell would have heard the slight rustling sound in the alcove bedroom behind him. In times of expected danger his alertness was something remarkable, but just now his mind was concentrated on the mysterious message which he had taken from the envelope.

Nor did Bart hear anything to arouse his suspicions.

A slight breeze came through the open bedroom window, and gently stirred the portières behind Frank's back.

Merriwell's face grew very pale as he read the opening words of the message, and his watching companion knew something had produced a profound effect on him.

"What is it?" Bart was compelled to ask.

"It is from my father, as I believed," said Merriwell, plainly making an effort to steady his voice. "I have read nothing but the opening sentence, but this is what it says:

"'This, my son, is the confession of your father, who, near to the point of death and beyond all hope of recovery, is lying in the cabin of Juan Delores, near Urmiston, which is about fifty miles from Denver.'"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Hodge. "Your father dying?"

"Dead by this time, it is likely," came sadly from Frank's lips. "And I not near in his last moments!"

The expression of regret and grief on Frank's face was sincere and profound.

"Too bad!" muttered Bart. "But he always was such a strange man!"

"Strange, indeed," nodded Frank. "I knew little of

his life after he went to seek his fortune amid the mines, save that part which is closely connected with his fight against his great enemy, Santenel. He told me that portion of it, but concerning the rest he has said little or nothing."

"This may throw light upon it. He calls it a confession."

"And the fact that he has called it that makes me hesitate once more about reading. But it must be done."

Again Merry lifted the message to read.

Over his shoulder darted a hand that snatched the message from his grasp!

At the same moment, uttering a cry of warning, Bart Hodge sprang to his feet, pointing toward the parted portières behind Merriwell.

Merry shot to his feet like a flash, but he was barely in time to see a man disappearing between the portières.

A second time had the precious message been snatched from his fingers.

"Stop him!" shouted Hodge.

Merry was first to leap between the portières, and yet he was barely in time to see a man disappearing through a window that led out upon a fire-escape.

A single glimpse of the man's face Merriwell obtained as he plunged after him. He saw him

entering the open window of an adjoining room, the fire-escape running from one window to the other.

At a single bound Frank reached the other window and followed the man into the room. The fugitive was passing out through a door that led into the hall as Merry jumped in by the window.

Toward that door bounded Merry. It was slammed in his face.

It had a spring-lock, and for a moment it bothered Frank, who was compelled to pause to open it. By that time Hodge had reached the window of the room, into which he looked in great surprise, seeing that Merry was there alone.

"Where is the——" Frank heard no more of Bart's question, for he tore open the door and leaped out into the corridor.

The fugitive had disappeared.

Frank went dashing along the passage, looking for the man, but seeing nothing of him. The fellow had disappeared in a most remarkable manner after leaving the room.

"Search, Hodge!" called Merry, and Bart joined in the hunt.

But though they searched everywhere, they found nothing of the man they were after. The hotel was aroused. The clerk in the office was notified, and he sent the hotel detective to join in the search.

But, after an hour of hunting, the searchers were forced to give up, as the unknown thief had not been found.

Then Merry went to the office and took a look at the register to find out who had occupied the room next to his—the one through which the desperate rascal had made good his retreat from the fire-escape.

The name on the register was "Anton Mescal, Fair Play, Col."

"Fair Play!" muttered Hodge, who was looking over Frank's shoulder. "What does a scoundrel like that know of fair play?"

Frank asked the clerk if he could give a description of Mescal.

"He is slender, looks like a Spaniard, and has a small, pointed, black mustache," was the answer. "I do not remember how he was dressed, so his clothes must have been fairly within the style."

"That's the man!" exclaimed Hodge. "I saw his face, and the description fits."

Frank nodded.

"I believe Mescal is the man," he said. "I will give one thousand dollars for his capture and the restoration to me of the document which he snatched from my hands."

The clerk looked at Merry, as if doubting his ability to pay such a sum; but the young Yale graduate was

taking a small roll of bills from his pocket. From the roll he drew off two five-hundred-dollar bills, which he handed to the cashier, who stood near the clerk.

"The money is to be paid to the person or persons who capture or cause to be captured the thief who stole the document from me, in case it is restored to my hands," said Merriwell quietly. "You are to enlist the services of the regular police and do everything in your power."

"The police have been called already," said the clerk. "I telephoned the nearest station immediately, and two officers appeared very shortly. They have been guarding the entrances to the hotel, while the regular house detectives have been searching. I suspected this Mescal and gave an accurate description of him to the policemen. They have not stopped him as yet."

"Only two officers on guard!" exclaimed Frank. "Yet there is a front and back entrance, and one through your barber's shop and by the way of the bar. Mr. Mescal is out of the hotel by this time."

"We have done everything we could," declared the clerk.

Frank turned away.

"The message is lost, Bart," he said.

"Lost?" said Bart, astonished that Frank should give up so easily.

"Yes," Merry nodded, his face wearing a grim expression.

Hodge was trembling with rage at the outcome.

"It's an infernal shame!" he hissed. "Merriwell, you must——"

Frank's hand gripped his arm.

"Come!" said Merry's voice, still calm and restrained.

Together they went to the nearest police-station, where Frank told his story to the sergeant in charge, repeating his offer for the arrest of the thief and the restoration of the message. He was told that everything possible should be done, and with that promise he was compelled to be satisfied.

Frank scarcely spoke as they returned to the hotel. Bart wiped the perspiration from his face and said things to himself.

In his room Merry sat quite still for some time, the look on his face indicating that he was in deep thought.

Bart did not venture to break in upon his meditations. To Hodge this second loss of the message, at the moment when Merry had begun to read it, was something to throw him into a perfect tempest of rage; but Frank had shown that he was master of his temper.

Bart knew Merry was thoughtfully considering the

situation and studying over it in view of the proper course to pursue. After half an hour he quietly said:

"That is what I'll do."

"What is it?" asked Bart, unable to repress his curiosity longer. "What have you decided to do?"

"I believe there is not one chance in a thousand that the man who snatched that message will be captured before he can get out of New York, and this has led me to decide on a course of action. In the single sentence that I read my father said that he was at the cabin of Juan Delores, near Urmiston, which is about fifty miles from Denver. I shall wait here until to-morrow. If the police have not made a capture by that time, I shall leave New York."

"Whither bound?"

"For the cabin of Juan Delores, near Urmiston, Colorado. I am going to find out the truth, if possible. There is a mystery to be solved, and I mean to solve it. Bart!"

"Frank!"

"Are you with me?"

Merry had risen. Hodge leaped to his feet. Their hands met, as Bart exclaimed:

"To the end, through thick and thin!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE OLD INDIAN.

Before them lay the mighty Rockies, rising range on range, till their glittering, snow-capped summits pressed the sky. Wild and picturesque and awe-inspiring was the scene. They were in the foot-hills, and the country was rough and broken.

Frank had drawn rein at the mouth of what seemed to be a small valley. He was covered with dust, and the hardy mustang he bestrode showed signs of weariness.

Merriwell was clothed to rough it, having exchanged the garments of the cities and towns for those more suited to the latter stages of his search for the cabin of Juan Delores. On his head was a wide-brimmed felt hat, and he wore a woolen shirt, with a side collar and a flowing tie, a cartridge-belt about his waist, and leather leggings covered his trousers nearly to his thighs. There were spurs on the heels of his boots. His coat he had stripped off, for the day was warm to an uncomfortable degree.

A Winchester repeating rifle was slung at the pommel of Merry's saddle, and a pair of long-barreled revolvers rested in the holsters on his hips. Taken

altogether, he looked like a young man who had made preparations for almost anything he might encounter.

Bart Hodge, similarly mounted and dressed, had drawn up beside Frank.

Despite their attire, there was something in the appearance of the two young men that marked them as belonging to "the tenderfoot breed." In other words, the experienced eye would have discovered at a glance that they were Easterners.

A cool breeze came down the valley, bearing with it a pleasant odor of wild growing things.

The faces of both lads, lately fresh from college, had been burned and blistered by the hot suns and searing winds.

"It's remarkable," said Frank, "that the people at Urmiston know Delores, know he lives somewhere in this vicinity, yet not one of them could give us accurate directions to reach his cabin."

"Hanged remarkable!" growled Bart. "This is the third day we have spent in hunting for his old place, and we've not even found a clue to it."

Merry nodded, frowning beneath the wide brim of his hat.

"We may have passed and repassed it," he said. "There are plenty of places where cabins could be hidden in these valleys."

"That's right. What are we to do?"

"Keep on hunting."

"It's rather tiresome."

"I shall stick to it till I find the cabin of Delores, if it takes a year!" exclaimed Frank grimly.

Bart knew he would do exactly as he said.

"Perhaps we may be disappointed when we do find it."

"At least, I should be able to learn if my father is dead, and where he is buried."

"But the message——"

"I have hopes that I may learn the secret of that, also. It may be that he did not trust it alone to that one document."

"It's getting late. What are we to do now? Shall we explore this valley to-night, or wait till morning?"

Little of the valley could be seen through the narrow pass, and that little seemed to promise that it led onward far into the hills. After a moment Frank answered:

"We'll ride forward and see if we can get a look into it."

He started onward, and Bart followed, but they had proceeded only a short distance when they were startled to see, sitting on a boulder at one side of the pass, a strange figure. At first it was hard to make out whether it was man or woman, but, as they

drew nearer, it straightened up and revealed, peering from the folds of a dirty red blanket, the wrinkled and gnarled face of an old Indian. A pair of beady black eyes were steadily regarding the two young men.

"Watch him, Merry," cautioned Bart, in a low tone. "These half-civilized red dogs are treacherous."

The Indian did not stir as they approached. Beside him, leaning against the boulder, was a handsome rifle. He did not touch the weapon.

"Hello, chief," said Frank, addressing the old man in a manner he knew was flattering to some redskins, as he drew up.

"How, how," grunted the old fellow, in answer.

"Are you acquainted in this vicinity?"

"Ak-waint?" said the old man. "No savvy."

"Are you familiar with the country?"

"Fam-mil? What him?"

"Have you been all round every place here?" asked Merry, with a sweep of his arm, using the simplest words he could command.

"Heap been all over," was the assurance.

"Know Juan Delores?"

"Him don't live round here."

The answer was prompt enough—a trifle too prompt, Frank fancied.

"Doesn't?" said Merry. "Where does he live?"

"Heap long way off there," and the redskin pointed to the north.

"Are you sure?"

"Heap sure."

"How far? How many miles?"

"Two time ten."

"Twenty?"

The old fellow grunted an affirmative.

"Do you know the way to his place?"

Another affirmative grunt.

"Can you guide us there?"

"No time."

"We will pay you well."

"No time."

"I will give you fifty dollars to guide us to the cabin of Juan Delores."

"No time."

"A hundred dollars."

"No time."

"Confound him!" growled Hodge angrily. "Money is no object to him. It's likely he doesn't know the value of money. Now, if you had a quart of whisky to offer him, Merriwell, you might get him to do the job."

"I will give you a new blanket and a rifle," promised Merry.

"Got blanket an' rifle," said the old Indian.

"I will give you a good horse."

"Got heap good horse."

"What haven't you got that you want?"

"No want nothin'."

"Will you tell us how to get to the cabin of Delores?"

"Go there two time ten mile, find stream, go up him to spring, take trail from spring; it make you come to where Juan he live."

Merriwell was not at all satisfied with these directions. There was something in the manner of the old redskin that seemed to arouse his suspicions and make him feel that he was being deceived. Of a sudden Frank asked:

"Who lives in this valley?"

The old man shook his head.

"No know," he said. "Wolf, bear, mebbe."

"That's not what I mean. Is there a white man who lives in this valley?"

Again a shake of the head.

"Wolf, bear, that all. No; big mount'n-lion—him there. Him kill hunter—one, two, t'ree, four hunter—what come for him. Him vely bad lion—heap bad."

Frank was watching the man closely.

"That's just what I'm looking for!" he exclaimed, as if delighted. "I want to shoot a mountain-lion."

"You no can shoot him. Big hunter try—no do it. Him kill you heap quick, you go in there."

"He is trying to frighten us so we'll not go into the valley," thought Frank. Aloud he said:

"That's all right; I'll take chances. I reckon the two of us will be too much for Mr. Lion."

"White boy much foolish," declared the old redskin grimly. "Make big supper for lion. Lion him like white man for supper."

"And I'll have the pelt of that lion just as sure as I live," said Merry, as if in sudden determination. "Come on, Bart!"

The old Indian rose quickly as they were about to start forward.

"Stop!" he cried. "Ole Joe Crowfoot him tell you truth. If you go in there you never come back some more. Ole Joe Crowfoot him good Injun—him like white man heap much. No want to see um hurt. Tell um to stay back."

The old savage seemed deeply in earnest now, but that earnestness was something that added to Frank's suspicions and made him all the more determined to go on.

"That's all right," said Merry, with a grim smile. "It's kind of you to take so much interest in us, but we're going after your heap bad lion, and we'll have his pelt."

"Night come soon," said the Indian, with a motion toward the range on range of mountains rising to the westward. "Then lion him crouch and spring. Him git you quick."

"We'll see. If you wait round here long enough we'll show you the pelt of your bad lion when we come back."

"No come back," declared Old Joe Crowfoot, solemnly. "No see you some more. By-by."

An expression of deep sadness and regret was on his wrinkled old face as he uttered the words. Merry laughed lightly, and they rode past him and headed onward into the valley.

"He was very anxious to stop us," said Hodge.

"That's right," nodded Frank. "He was altogether too anxious. As soon as I tumbled to that I decided to take a look into the valley. Do you know, we stumbled on the entrance to this valley by accident. I fancy we might search a week for it, if we were to go away now, without finding it."

"I was thinking of that," said Bart. "It might puzzle us to find it again. Perhaps that old duffer was counting on that. Those red dogs are treacherous, and——"

They heard a sharp cry behind them. Whirling in the saddle, Frank saw the old Indian standing with the butt of his rifle pressed against his shoulder.

The muzzle on the rifle was turned directly toward Frank, and plainly the redskin was on the point of pressing the trigger.

Frank knew he was in deadly peril, and he would have attempted to fling himself from the saddle but for something else he saw.

On a mass of jagged rocks behind the Indian and about twenty feet above his head had appeared a boy. Not over thirteen years of age was the lad, whose curly, dark hair fell upon his shoulders. He was dressed in fanciful garments, like those worn by a young Mexican lad, and the bright colors of his clothes made him a picturesque figure.

Plainly it was from his lips that the cry had issued.

In his hand the boy held a stone as large as a man's fist, and even as Merry turned he hurled the stone. Straight through the air whizzed the missile, striking the barrel of the old Indian's rifle.

Smoke belched from the muzzle of the weapon and the crags flung back the sound of the report, but the bullet flew wild.

Frank Merriwell's life had been saved by the stone thrown by the strange boy.

With an exclamation of rage, Hodge snatched up his rifle and reined his mount round to take a shot at the redskin, who had wheeled instantly and was

clambering up the rocks toward the boy, as if bent on murder.

"Soak him, Merry!" panted Bart.

Frank's first impulse was to shoot, but he quickly saw that he was in no further danger just then, and he had no desire to shed human blood unless compelled to do so.

Bart's rifle rose, but Merry thrust the muzzle aside just as the weapon spoke, and the bullet flattened on the rocks.

"Why did you do that?" roared Hodge, in amazement and anger. "Can't you see! That red devil is going to murder the kid!"

It did seem that the Indian meant the boy harm, and Merry shouted:

"If you put a hand on that boy I'll bore you!"

At the same time he held his own rifle ready for instant use.

Old Joe Crowfoot seemed either not to hear or to be too enraged to heed. Like a mountain goat, he raced upward over the rocks and hastened straight toward the boy. But, what was strangest of all, the boy made no effort to escape, nor did he seem at all frightened. Instead, he seemed to stand and await the approach of the Indian.

Frank and Bart were surprised by this, but they were still more surprised by what followed. The In-

dian reached the boy and quickly clutched him. Then, with a swift swing, the strange old redskin swept the lad round behind him and up to his back. The arms of the boy immediately clasped about the Indian's neck, while his legs twined round the old fellow's body, and there he hung pickapack fashion.

Scarcely had Old Joe Crowfoot paused in his upward race. When Frank and Bart had confronted him at the mouth of the valley both had fancied him old and rather feeble, but now he seemed to have the strength of a youth and the agility of a mountain-goat. Having swung the boy to his back, he continued to clamber upward over the rocks as if quite unimpeded by his burden.

"Well," gasped Hodge, "if that doesn't beat the old boy himself!"

Merry was no less amazed. To both it had seemed that the old Indian meditated doing the boy harm as he clambered toward him, but the youngster had betrayed no fear, although his hand flung the missile that destroyed Old Joe's aim and saved Frank Merriwell's life.

"He's running off with the boy!" palpitated Bart.

"And the boy is perfectly willing," said Merry.

"But the kid threw the stone at the old duffer."

"For which I am very thankful, as it is certain the old duffer meant to perforate me."

Then they sat there on their horses and watched till the old Indian and his remarkable burden disappeared amid the rocks. Just before vanishing from view, Old Joe Crowfoot paused, turned and looked down on the boys. Then he made a gesture that seemed to be one of warning. The boy, still clinging to the back of his peculiar companion, took off his wide hat and waved it gaily. A moment later they were gone.

Frank and Bart sat there, staring upward and remaining silent for some moments. At last Merriwell said:

"Well, that little affair is over. Let's move along and see what will happen next."

"I don't understand it," muttered Hodge, in disappointed perplexity.

"Nor do I," confessed Frank cheerfully.

"It's strange."

"Mighty strange."

"A white boy and an Indian."

"Companions beyond a doubt."

"Yet the boy threw a stone at the Indian."

"I believe he threw the stone to hit the Indian's rifle, a feat he accomplished. I do not think he intended to hit the Indian. Anyhow, I owe him my life, and I am grateful."

For a few minutes longer they remained there, discussing what had happened, and then Merry again

led the way into the valley. As they advanced it slowly broadened before them. The valley was eight or ten miles in length, and a stream ran through it, disappearing into a narrow gorge. Near the head of the valley was a pretty little lake, with timber about it. In the valley were to be seen a few grazing cattle, yet from their position the boys could see no ranch-house.

"But I'm certain somebody lives here," said Frank. "The sight of the cattle convinces me of that."

They soon found that it was no easy matter to ride down into the valley from that point, but they discovered a dimly defined trail, which they ventured to follow. Fortunately the hardy little mustangs were steady and sure of foot, for there were points where it seemed that no horse could go down without falling.

The little beasts squatted on their haunches more than once and literally slid along till they could recover themselves.

Bart had his teeth set, and no word came from his lips, as he was ready and determined to follow wherever Merriwell led. No accident happened, and the level of the valley was reached. Then they headed toward the lake at the upper end.

The sun was dropping behind the western peaks when they entered a strip of timber that lay across their path in the vicinity of the lake.

The cattle they had passed gave them little notice, convincing them that they were accustomed to the presence and sight of mounted riders. The timber was open, yet they were unable to ride through it at a swift pace, as they had not entered on a regular trail. When they had proceeded a considerable distance they came at last upon a path. In the deepening gloom it was not easy to make out if it was a horse-trail or a foot-path.

As they reached this path, Frank suddenly pulled up, uttering a soft word of warning.

"Stop, Hodge!" he said. "I thought I heard something."

Bart stopped promptly, and they sat there, motionless and listening. At first they heard no sound save the breathing of their mounts. Bart was about to speak, when Merry lifted his hand.

Straining their ears, they distinctly made out the sound of swift footsteps, which were approaching. Hodge gripped the butt of a revolver and drew it from its holster. A moment later the silence of the gloomy timber was broken by a sound that sent the blood leaping to their hearts.

"Help! Oh, oh—help!"

It was the cry of a child in great fear and distress.

CHAPTER X.

THE KIDNAPED GIRL.

"Choke off the kid, Bill! Are you crazy, to let her screech like that?"

The command came quick and sharp and suppressed.

"Hanged ef I like this yar business of chokin' babbys! I wouldn't mind ef she wuz a man."

The retort was growled forth in a gruff bass voice. Two dark forms were seen coming along the path. One of them, the one in advance, carried in his arms a little girl of twelve.

The ruffians did not observe Frank and Bart until they were quite close. Then, of a sudden, as the big fellow in advance halted, uttering a startled oath, Merriwell's clear voice rang out:

"Drop that child, you whelps, or we'll drop you."

The man behind made a quick movement, and Frank flung himself from the saddle. It was well Merry did so, for the man had whipped out a revolver and fired over the shoulder of his companion, the bullet whistling past Frank's ear as he dropped.

"Got him!" grated the man, evidently believing he had shot the youth. "Down goes the other one!"

Bart had a revolver in his grasp, but, in the gloom of the timber, he had refrained from firing, fearing to injure the girl, who now uttered another cry for help.

But Hodge knew he was in danger, and he feared Frank had been hit by the shot of the ruffian. He ducked beside the neck of his horse and was barely in time to save his life, for another flash of fire punctured the shadows, another report rang through the timber, and the second bullet cut a hole through the hat of the dark-faced youth.

Then Hodge saw Merriwell leaping straight at the ruffian in advance, and he knew Frank was not seriously hurt. With a shout of relief and satisfaction, Bart sprang to the ground and jumped after Frank.

"Give it to the dogs, Merry!" he exclaimed.

Merriwell was on the big ruffian in a moment. The man had swung the child under his arms, and he brought forth a revolver as Frank came up.

The young athlete ducked and struck out, and the revolver was sent spinning from the grasp of the wretch, being discharged as it flew through the air.

Then Merry was on the scoundrel and the ruffian was forced to drop the child and meet the attack of the fearless youth.

Hodge went past like a leaping panther, but the other man had darted behind a tree and melted away amid the underbrush in a most surprising manner, and

while Bart slashed about in search of the fellow who had disappeared, Merriwell fought the other, who was a gigantic man of remarkable strength.

The child had crept away a short distance, where it crouched on the ground, watching the battle in fascination and fear.

"Dern yer!" growled the ruffian. "Whatever do ye mean by botherin' two peaceable gents in this yar way?"

"We mean business," answered Frank.

"Waal, danged ef I don't cut yer inter ribbons!" declared the giant, as he made a movement and wrenched forth a knife.

Frank moved swiftly, and was barely in time to fasten his fingers on the wrist of the murderous wretch.

"No, you don't!" he exclaimed. "I object to anything of the sort!"

"Object and be dished!" came from the other. "Why, do you think yer kin hold that yar hand? Ye're nothin' but a kid!"

Then the ruffian made a furious, wrenching twist to get his hand free, but, to his surprise, the grip of the beardless youth was like steel, and he failed utterly in his attempt.

This was the fellow's first surprise; others followed swiftly.

"What's this?" he howled, in fury. "Dang my hoofs! kin you hang on that way?"

"You'll find I'm something of a sticker," laughed Frank.

Now, the other did not know that when Frank Merriwell laughed in that peculiar manner he was the most dangerous, and he fancied the youth thought the affair not at all serious.

"I'll git him in a minute," the ruffian mentally decided, "an' I'll give him the length of this yar toad-sticker, which'll convince him that this is a mighty sad world, I reckon."

But though he made another furious attempt to get his hand free, the fingers of the youth were like riveted bands. Then the ruffian grew still more angry.

"Double dern yer!" he panted. "You kin hang on, so I reckon I'll just have ter break yer back!"

Then he tried to fling Frank to the ground, but Merry used a wrestling-trip, and the man went down instead. In the fall the grip of the youth was almost broken, and, with a snarl of satisfaction, the ruffian twisted his wrist free.

Then he swung back his hand to drive that terrible knife to the hilt between Merry's ribs. But Frank knew his danger, and, like a flash, he had the thick, hairy wrist again in his clutch.

The man swore and tried to fling his youthful an-

tagonist off, but he found he could not do so and retain his hold on the knife. Then he relinquished the knife and put every effort into the struggle to hurl Merry aside.

The little girl, on her knees by the foot of a great tree, watched this fearful battle with distended eyes.

Bart Hodge was still beating about for the man who had so cleverly vanished in the gloom. There was a sudden report, as fire belched from a tangled thicket, and a bullet grazed Bart's cheek.

Hodge dropped, knowing now the other man had sought shelter, and waited till he felt that he could bring one of the youths down with a sure shot. Evidently the man believed he had succeeded, for he rose to his feet, so that Bart obtained a glimpse of him.

In his impatient rage, Hodge did not wait for the fellow to advance, but he took a quick aim and fired immediately. Down went the man.

"Soaked him!" said Bart grimly. "He brought it on himself."

Then he lifted himself to his feet. It was Bart's turn to meet with surprise, for again from the thicket came a flash of fire, and this time Hodge felt something burn and sting in his shoulder.

With a shout of fury, Hodge leaped straight toward the thicket, into which he fearlessly plunged, reckless of his life.

But when he reached the spot where he believed the enemy must be, he found no one there. The desperado had slipped away as Hodge came leaping toward the spot, being aided to escape by the deepening darkness.

Finding the man was not there, the conviction came on Hodge that he was crouching near, waiting to obtain another shot, which he would take care to make sure. Then the instinct of self-preservation overcame Bart's great fury, and he crouched close to the ground, holding his revolver ready, while he peered about in the gloom and listened.

Not far away the battle between Frank and the giant ruffian was still raging fiercely.

With every sense on the alert, Bart squatted there, ready to shoot or spring. His nerves were tingling, but he did his best to be steady and cool. An encounter of this sort, however, was something to unsteady the nerves of almost any man, and it was not at all strange that Bart found himself shaking somewhat as he remained motionless and waiting.

The breathing of the floundering giant who was trying to conquer Merriwell sounded hoarsely through the gloom, and there was something awesome in it. Suddenly the sounds stopped. The struggle seemed to be ended. Who had conquered?

At the risk of betraying his position to the man

who might be waiting to shoot at him, Bart ventured to call:

"Merriwell!"

Hodge's heart gave a leap of joy when Frank's voice answered:

"Here! Are you all right?"

"Sure thing! And you?"

"Well, I've succeeded in quieting this chap, though he did put up an awful fight."

"Look out for the other!"

"Then he is——"

"He's around here somewhere. I popped at him two or three times, but I didn't bag him."

Crouching low, Bart moved as quietly as he could toward Frank, still ready to shoot instantly. But in the gloom no pistol flashed, and no deadly bullet sang through the timber.

Bart found Merriwell with his arm about the frightened child, while near-by, on the ground, lay the body of the giant, sprawling grotesquely.

"Have you killed him?" asked Hodge, looking down at the silent ruffian.

"I'm afraid so," said Frank.

"Afraid?" exclaimed the dark-faced youth.

"Yes."

"Why afraid?"

"I have no desire to kill anybody."

"But this murderous dog——"

"Not even a human being of his caliber."

"Well," said Hodge grimly, "I did my level best to bore the other cur, and my conscience would not have troubled me had I succeeded. How did you do this one?"

"He had wonderful strength and wind, and he thrashed round to beat the band. I was forced to be at my best all the time, and I hurled him back repeatedly after he had partly succeeded in rising with me. The last time I did so his head struck against the exposed root of that tree, and it doubled under him with a snap like a pistol-shot. Then he was limp as a rag, and the fight was over, so far as he was concerned."

Bart caught the ruffian by the shoulders and partly lifted him. Then he let the fellow drop back, a slight shiver running over him.

"Neck broken!" he said shortly.

"Broken!" exclaimed Frank. "As bad as that?"

"Sure thing!" said Hodge. "He won't try to kidnap any more children, for I reckon that was what they were doing with this one."

Frank turned his attention to the child once more, while Bart looked after the tired mustangs. As he approached the animals, a figure suddenly sprang out of the gloom and onto the back of one of them. There

was a yell, and away dashed the animal along the path, bearing the ruffian who had escaped.

Hodge took a shot at the fellow, and then, finding the man still clung to the mustang, having disappeared in the gloom, he fired again in the direction of the sound. Still the mustang fled on with its burden, and Bart muttered an exclamation of rage.

The other animal had been alarmed by this, and Bart found some trouble in approaching the creature, though he finally succeeded in capturing him.

"Well, Merriwell," he said, as he returned, leading the single mount, "we've lost one of our beasts."

Frank had been trying to allay the fears of the trembling child, and he simply made a gesture for Bart to be quiet, which was seen and understood, for all of the fast-deepening shadows.

"We will not harm you," Merry was saying, in a soft, gentle way. "You need have no further fear. What is your name?"

"Felicia," was the low answer. "But Old Joe calls me Star Eyes."

"Felicia—what a pretty name!" said Frank. "And these bad men were carrying you off?"

"Yes. Please take me home."

"We'll do that, little Felicia. Your home is here, in the valley?"

"Yes, sir. It's in the Black Woods, by Lake Sunshine."

"Lake Sunshine? Another pretty name! What do you call the valley?"

"Pleasant Valley."

"And that is a pretty name, too."

"My mama named the lake, and the valley, and the woods. But now she's gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes, and papa says she's gone to a beautifuler world than this, though it doesn't seem to me it can be true, and I know just where papa put her in the ground when she died. I was there putting flowers on her grave, and the grave of the Good Stranger, when those bad men grabbed me and carried me away."

Frank felt a queer thrill.

"The Good Stranger?" he said. "Who was that?"

"Oh, I loved him, and Dick loved him, and we all loved him, for he was so kind. But the fever took him, and he died, too. He is buried near my mama."

"What was his name?"

"I don't know. Old Joe called him White Beard, but I just called him uncle."

"How long ago was it that he died?"

"More than a week, now. Papa buried him, too."

Bart's hand fell on the shoulder of Frank, who was kneeling, with one arm about the little girl. That touch told that Hodge was beginning to realize just what Merry's questions were leading to, which filled him with eagerness.

"What is your papa's name?" asked Merry, and then held his breath as he waited for the answer.

"I just call him papa," said the child. "Please take me to him. He will be so sorry when he finds I'm not at home."

"In a moment we'll take you to him. You call him papa, but what do others call him?"

"Nobody ever comes here much, except Old Joe, and he calls my papa Silent Tongue."

"Who is Old Joe?"

"A good Indian."

Merry started a bit, and then quickly asked:

"Do you mean Old Joe Crowfoot?"

"Papa calls him Crowfoot sometimes. Please take me to my papa."

"The scent grows hot!" muttered Hodge.

"And did you never hear your father called anything but Silent Tongue? What did your mother call him?"

"Most times she called him dearest, but sometimes she called him——"

"Yes, yes—she called him what?"

"Juan."

"I knew it!" broke from Hodge. "We're on the right trail, Merry!"

"At last!" exclaimed Frank, in deep satisfaction. "Little Felicia, we'll take you to your father without delay."

CHAPTER XI.

JUAN DELORES.

They left the big ruffian lying there in the darkness of the timber. Little Felicia was placed on the back of the mustang, beside which Frank walked, while Bart led the way along the path.

Having passed from the dark timber, they came out near the pretty little lake, which was reflecting the golden glory of the lingering sunset, flung up against the mountain-bordered sky. The crimson and amber and purple were fading from the heavens as the somber wing of night spread over the world.

"There are the Black Woods," said the little girl, as she indicated a thick mass of trees near the head of the valley. "My home is in there."

By the dying light Frank made out that she was very pretty, with dark hair and eyes. She had a sweet voice.

"Felicia," he thought, as they made their way toward the woods. "The name seems to fit her. It seems strange to find such a child here."

Merry was restraining the impatience that beset him, for now he felt that he was near the end of his long search. He had no doubt that the Good Stranger

spoken of by the child was his father, who had died there in that wild but beautiful spot—died as he had lived, strangely.

There was a mystery to be unfolded, and Frank was determined to clear it up, if possible.

"Up there," said Felicia, with a gesture, "is the place where my mama and the Good Stranger are buried."

Frank was near the grave of his father, he believed. It was too late to visit it then; besides, Merry felt that it was his duty to take the child home without delay. Felicia had explained that her father was away at the time when the men came upon her and carried her away, having left some hours before, saying he would return ere nightfall, and warning her to stay close to her cabin home.

As they approached the Black Woods they could discern the dark opening where the trail entered. There the track was plain beneath their feet. But when they were yet a little distance from the woods a stern voice cried from the darkness of the shadows:

"Halt, dere!"

Bart stopped, his hand flying to the butt of his revolver. His rifle, swinging from the saddle of his mustang, had been lost when the escaping ruffian rode madly away on the beast.

"Don't try to draw da gun!" came the voice from

the woods. "Shoot mighty quick if you do! Up with da hands!"

"It's papa!" exclaimed little Felicia. "Papa! papa!"

Bart shrugged his shoulders and lifted his hands.

"T'other one put up da hands," came the voice.

"We are friends," declared Frank quietly. "We have just saved your child from the hands of ruffians."

"Put up da hands!" ordered the voice, and there was a clicking that seemed to tell of a rifle being cocked. I'll shoot if you don't!"

Merry stood up boldly, facing the point from which the voice came, fearlessly saying:

"If you shoot, you will fire on those who have saved your child, which will prove you a dastard. I refuse to be held up road-agent style, and shall not lift my hands. Fire if you will!"

Silence for a moment, and then, quick as thought, the child leaned over and put her arms about Merry's neck, crying:

"Don't, papa—don't! He beat the big, bad man who was carrying me away!"

Another silence, and then the voice called:

"Felicia!"

"Papa!"

"Get off dat horse and come here quick-a!"

She seemed to hesitate, and then she tightened her arms about Frank's neck, murmuring in his ear:

"Don't be afraid. I'll not let my papa hurt you."

A second later she had slipped to the ground and was running toward the dark woods, into which she disappeared.

Frank and Bart stood waiting what was to follow. The sound of murmuring voices came from amid the grim old trees, and the child was heard relating to her father the story of her thrilling and exciting adventures. But it seemed that the man meditated upon the proper course to pursue, for she was forced to plead with him in behalf of Frank and Bart.

"They are good, papa—I know they are," they heard her declare. "The one who fought so hard for me with the great, big, bad man is just as kind and gentle."

After a time the man came forth from the darkness, leading the child by the hand, while he carried his rifle in his other hand. He seemed to be keenly on the alert, as if he did not trust the strangers, for all of the words of his child.

"I have to t'ank you," he said, with an accent, "for what you have done. My little Felicia, she tell me. She is all I have left now. When I come on my way home and hear da shooting, my heart it jump like a frog into my mouth-a. I run home quick as I can, and call, call, call for her. She do not answer. Den I t'ink somet'ing have happen to her, and I start to run

dis way fast. When I come here to da edge of da woods I see you coming dis way, and I stop. You bring my little Felicia back-a to me, and I t'ank you."

The child seemed to look at her father in surprise, as if she were not accustomed to hearing him speak thus freely.

"We are happy to be of service to you and little Felicia, Mr. Delores," said Merry quietly.

The man was seen to start a bit, while he gripped his rifle still harder.

"You know my name?" he said, a bit harshly.

"Yes."

"How?"

"We have come far to find you."

This seemed to put him more than ever on his guard.

"What do you want?"

"The story is rather long," said Merry. "There is no chance for us to get out of this valley to-night. Take us to your home and I will tell you everything. I do not think you will regret it."

"Why should I do dat? You are strangers."

"That is true, but you knew Charles Merriwell."

Frank looked straight and hard at the man as he uttered the words, but, to his surprise, the father of

little Felicia did not betray emotion of any sort—or the darkness hid his betrayal.

"Charles Merriwell?" he said. "Who you mean?"

"The Good Stranger, who lies buried over yonder."

"What you know 'bout him?"

"He was my father."

Little Felicia gave a cry, but the man simply said: "How you prove dat?"

"I can prove it. I am Frank Merriwell, well known in New Haven, where I have been at college. This is my friend Bart Hodge, who will tell you whatever you wish to know about me."

"But I know not'ing of him. Dat be no proof. Have you de word?"

"The word?"

"Dat's what I ask."

Frank was forced to confess that he did not know what Juan Delores meant by "the word."

"Den you be not Frank Merriwell!" positively declared the man.

"I do not know what you mean by 'the word.'" Merry said, "but I assure you that you are wrong about me not being Frank Merriwell."

"He would come with da word."

"Then you have been expecting him?"

"I no say so."

"But you have the same as said so. There has been a failure of the plans, Mr. Delores, and that is why I do not come with the word you expect. I will explain everything to you if you will give me a chance."

"Why should I trust-a you?"

"Your daughter, safe at your side, answers that question."

"Follow me," said Juan Delores, turning about.

Frank had won, and he followed, Bart striding along at his side, saying nothing, but thinking a great deal. They entered the Black Woods by the dark trail, which it was now difficult to follow, proceeding till they came to a cabin in the very midst of the growth. No light gleamed from the cabin, but Delores said:

"Dis my home. Felicia, you take da stranger in da house and make da light. I take da horse. I come prit' quick."

Frank surrendered the mustang to the man, and then they followed little Felicia into the cabin, wondering why the home had been built in the midst of that gloomy growth of trees.

The child found matches and lighted an oil-lamp which stood on a table in the living-room—the room they had entered. The light showed them a comfortably, even tastily, furnished room, much to their surprise. It was small, but the walls were tinted blue, the floor carpeted, and the furniture was good. There

were handsome paintings on the walls, while at the two windows were lace curtains. A handsome piano stood in one corner of the room, opposite an open fireplace of stone.

Both Bart and Frank were surprised, and they exchanged glances which told each other their feelings.

By the light of the lamp, Merry saw that little Felicia was pretty, indeed, with a dark, oval face, and snowy white teeth.

"Let me take your hats," she said, smiling at them. "Sit down. Papa will be right in."

They sat down, and Merry, finding a guitar, soon occupied himself. Having tightened the strings and put the instrument in tune, he strummed lightly upon it, singing a soft little song to the girl, who came and stood near, her hands clasped, looking at him earnestly.

While Merry was singing, Juan Delores came to the door and paused a moment. He looked in and beheld the spectacle. It reassured him and banished his fears. When he came in he closed and bolted the door.

"I see you make yorse'f at home," he said. "Good!"

He was a man with a Spanish face and deep, dark eyes. His face was not exactly handsome, and yet about it there was something fascinating. He had a mustache and imperial, which had once been coal-black, but were now heavily mixed with gray.

Delores had studied Merriwell's face as he stood outside the door, and what he saw seemed to restore his confidence. Surely, this frank-appearing youth who was singing to Felicia could not be very bad.

But, when he looked at Bart, Delores was not so sure, for the face of Hodge was not one so easily read.

Felicia clapped her hands.

"Oh, that's a fine song!" she cried.

"You like music, do you?"

"Oh, yes, I do! I can sing."

"I shall be delighted to hear you sing."

"Mama taught me," said the little girl soberly. "She used to sing such sweet songs."

Juan Delores had very little to say, though he lingered a while and listened to their talk. At last he said:

"I see you all right, young gentlemen. I go get da supper. Mebbe you be hungry?"

"Well," smiled Frank, "to confess the truth, I am ravenous."

"And I'm rather empty myself," acknowledged Bart dryly.

"I have not much fine food," said Delores; "but I t'ink I have somet'ing to fill you on."

"That's what we're looking for, Mr. Delores," said

Merry. "You'll not be troubled by our fastidiousness."

"Can I help you, papa?" asked little Felicia.

"No; you stay and make da gentlemen company."

Then, having stood quite still and looked at Merry, the queer man suddenly held out his hand, exclaiming:

"I t'ank you, sir, for save my little girl. I love her. She is all I have left since her mother go 'way forever."

Frank was touched.

"Don't mention it, Delores," he said, as he took the offered hand. "Her cry of distress appealed to me, and I was ready to fight to the death for her."

"I know da men who were carryin' her off," said Felicia's father, his eyes flashing. "Da come here an' make da threat when da no find what da want. I go to look for dem, but I did not t'ink da get dis side of me. I t'ink my Felicia be safe."

Then he stooped and put his arms lovingly about the little girl, whom he kissed with great tenderness.

"You knew the men?" said Merry. "What did they want?"

"Somet'ing da never get," answered Delores. "Da big one be Gunnison Bill, da worst dog in da State!"

"That's the one I had the fight with," nodded Merry.

"With him? Why, he much bigger dan you!"

"Somewhat."

"How you fight him?"

"Hand to hand. He pulled a knife on me, but I got him by the wrist and forced him to drop it."

Delores seemed unable to believe this.

"Why, you very young!" he said. "You almost boy. Gunnison Bill, he is giant."

"Mr. Merriwell is an athlete," put in Hodge. "He is the champion all-round athlete of Yale—or was."

"Mr. Merriwell!" said Delores, again looking searchingly at Frank. "Why you call him dat?"

"Because it is his name, even though you, for some unknown reason, seem to think contrary."

Juan Delores shook his head.

"It is very queer," he said. "If he be Frank Merriwell, he should bring da word."

"I think I know what you mean by that," said Merry. "'The word' is something my father told you I would be able to give when I appeared. I will explain after supper why I am unable to give the word. I believe I can satisfy you, sir."

"I hope you do dat; but never till you give da word am I to do it."

"Do what?"

"Dat I shall not tell."

"It is plain that you are bound not to betray your

trust, Mr. Delores, whatever it is. I admire you because you are faithful."

"An' I admire you because you whip da Gunnison Bill. How you do it I cannot guess."

"Oh, papa, he did fight so hard, and I was so afraid!" exclaimed Felicia. "Once I thought sure the bad man would kill him right before me, but I prayed to the Lord."

"Did you pray?" breathed Frank, drawing her to his knee. "Bless you, sweet little Felicia! Perhaps it was your prayer that saved my life!"

"Do you think so?"

"It may be. Who knows?"

"*Quien sabe,*" said Juan Delores. "But it was not Gunnison Bill dat be most dangerous. It was da odder. I know him—I know Anton Mescal!"

"Anton Mescal?" shouted Frank, leaping to his feet and clutching the man's arm. "Good heavens! do you mean to tell me that the man with Gunnison Bill was Anton Mescal?"

"Dat his name. He come here an' try to bluff me two days ago. I laugh at him. He swear he make me laugh some odder way. He try to keep his word."

"Anton Mescal!" repeated Merry, in deep emotion. "And it was too dark for me to recognize the wretch who stole the message from me! Oh, if I had grappled with him, instead of Gunnison Bill!"

"Oh, if I had bored him with a bullet!" grated Hodge, who was even more excited than Merry.

"You know him?" questioned Delores.

"Know him?" said Frank. "I never saw the scoundrel but once in my life, but on that occasion he snatched from my hands the dying message sent me by my father, who, I believe, is buried in this valley."

Delores could not help being impressed by the words and manner of the two young men.

"Dat why Anton Mescal come here an' make him demand," he said. "But he never succeed. Da boy is safe."

CHAPTER XII.

DELORES UNMASKS.

The suspicions of Juan Delores were allayed at last, and he left the boys with Felicia, while he retired to an adjoining room to prepare the supper. Frank and Bart were given something to talk about.

"Mescal is near," said Merry. "He may have that message on his person. If fate will only bring us face to face once more!"

"If fate had directed one of my bullets!" exclaimed Hodge. "What do you suppose that message contains?"

"You have asked me a question to which I cannot imagine the answer."

"Your father was very rich."

"Yes."

"And peculiar."

"True."

"Where is his wealth?"

"Heaven knows."

"Where is his will?"

"Give it up."

"That message must have told where to find his wealth and the will he has left."

"Perhaps so. But something tells me that was not all. I am certain the message held something more—a secret of great importance."

"Mescal is a desperate scoundrel. He will not be driven away easily."

"I hope not."

Felicia came and climbed on Frank's knee once more.

"You have had trouble," she said, in her tender, sympathetic way. "Your papa is dead. Was the Good Stranger your papa?"

"I think so, little one," said Frank.

"He was kind to me," said she; "but he loved Dick most."

"Dick—who is Dick?"

"Dick is my cousin. He lives here."

"Here? Why, I have not seen him."

"Oh, no! He is away now."

"Away where?"

"He has gone with Old Joe. Once before he went away with Old Joe, and was gone a whole month. But I miss him so much, for I love him."

"Is his name Dick Delores?"

"I don't know. All I ever called him was just Dick. Oh, but he can shoot and ride, and Joe is teaching him everything he knows."

"How old is Dick?"

"One year older than I am."

"The boy we saw with the old Indian!" exclaimed Bart.

"The boy who saved my life!" said Merry, who then told Felicia what had happened at the entrance to the valley.

"That was Dick!" she cried, "and that was Old Joe! But why did Old Joe want to shoot at you?" she speculated, her face clouding. "He is papa's friend."

"He must have thought me your father's enemy," spoke Frank.

"He must," nodded Felicia gravely. "Old Joe would not wish to shoot a friend."

"The mystery of the Indian and the boy is solved," said Merry.

"Still, it's rather singular," muttered Bart. "Why should Delores let the boy go with that old savage?"

"Papa sent Dick away with Old Joe," put in Felicia.

"Sent him away?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I don't know, but I think he was afraid the bad men would carry Dick off, same as they tried to carry me."

Frank's face showed that he was thinking deeply.

"Why should they carry Dick off?" he asked him-

self. "It must be that there is treasure buried near here, and they are seeking to wring it from Delores. But the man took extra precautions to protect the boy, while he did not seem to fear for the safety of his own child, as he left her entirely alone. There is much about this affair that is not clear to me."

Then Delores appeared at the door and announced that supper was ready. They went back to the dining-room, Merry carrying little Felicia in his arms.

The room was quite as pretty as the living-room. In the center stood the table, covered by a clean, white cloth, with the dishes and food upon it. A sideboard had been built in the wall. The chairs were of the rustic variety, plainly also the handiwork of Delores. The cook-room, in an ell-like part of the cabin, was shut off from view by a swinging spring-door.

"Welcome," said Delores.

"Thank you," bowed Frank. "Your hospitality is appreciated, you may be sure."

"That's right," said Bart, as his eyes ran over the table. "Don't believe I was ever hungrier."

They sat down, Delores at the head, with Felicia opposite. Frank and Bart sat on the opposite sides of the table. When they were seated, the little girl placed her soft white hands together, bowed her head, and said "grace" in a simple, touching way.

Then, when the "amen" had risen from the lips of

the three men at the table, Delores lifted the cover of a platter and revealed to view some broiled steak, the sight of which made Bart Hodge positively ravenous.

That supper was enjoyed by all. Delores smiled when he realized how hungry his visitors were, and he was pleased to see them satisfy the cravings of their appetites.

Merry sought to satisfy Delores that he was no impostor; but the man was on his guard, and it was not easy to tell what thoughts were passing through his mind. Then Frank told of the adventures at the entrance to the valley, relating how the old Indian had tried to frighten them from entering, and had declared that Juan Delores lived far away to the north.

"He faithful old fellow!" exclaimed Delores. "Once, long time ago, he come here very sick—just able to crawl to door. My wife, she take him in an' doctor him; she get him well, though he have da fever. He never forget. He do anyt'ing for us."

"Even to commit murder," said Hodge. "He would have shot one or both of us if the boy had not hurled a rock and struck the barrel of his rifle."

Felicia clapped her hands.

"Dick can throw a rock just as straight!" she exclaimed. "Oh, he can do lots of things, and Old Joe has promised to teach him all the things he knows about the mountains, the prairies, and the woods."

"His education is well begun," said Frank, "but it is the finishing off that will count."

"Oh, he can read and write and all dat!" quickly exclaimed Juan. "My wife, she be educated American, and she teach Dick and Felicia."

The laughter passed swiftly from the face of the girl, and she sadly said:

"Yes, mama used to teach us every day, but Dick was so hard to teach—he was so wild. Now mama is gone, and I have tried to teach myself; but Dick will not study at all."

Frank felt like asking Delores some questions about the mysterious boy with the old Indian, but, feeling that he had no right to do so, he refrained. It seemed that Delores felt like explaining a part of the mystery, which led him to volunteer:

"Anton Mescal, he come after Dick. Dat why I let Old Joe take da boy. Old Joe protec' him."

"Then it is Dick, not Felicia, that Mescal wants?"

Delores nodded.

"If you have da word, you would know dat," he declared.

And then it was that Merriwell began to feel that there was some strange, invisible link that connected himself with this wild boy of the mountains.

Delores had talked far more than usual with him, and he suddenly showed a disposition to close up like

a clam. Merry fancied it must be because he thought the conversation was getting on dangerous ground, and this caused Frank to lead it in another direction.

"How did you happen to settle here in this out-of-the-way place, Mr. Delores?" he asked. "Why did you build your home here in this thick piece of woods?"

"Hard to see it here," was the answer.

"Then you did not wish it seen?"

"No."

"And that was why you selected this valley, which might be passed and repassed without finding a good way of descending into it?"

Delores nodded.

"It is a good place for a man who chooses the life of a hermit," said Bart, "but one is out of the world here."

"Dat not true," said Juan. "Dis is God's world here! Da mountain, da blue sky, da wild flower, da sweet air, da birds—it is God's world."

"It is beautiful!" murmured Felicia.

"But monotonous!" muttered Bart.

"Some men cannot choose," said Juan. "I was one of dat kind. I have to make my home where I can be safe."

"That's different," said Frank.

Somehow, Delores seemed to fancy that both visit-

ors looked on him with suspicion after that speech, and he hastened to add:

"I do no crime—no. I do not'ing in this country to make me hide-a."

They looked at him in silence. Somehow, that seemed to sting him deeply, for he suddenly burst forth:

"If you knew! I have kep' da secret long—I have kep' da silence. Now Mescal, he know all 'bout it. How he find it out I do not know; but he will tell it everywhere. Da secret will be no longer one. Soon I shall have to go 'way from dis valley. I have t'ought dat some time."

"Oh, papa—oh, no, no, no!" cried Felicia, springing from her place and running round to him. "Go away from here? Leave my dear mama out there all alone? Oh, no, no, no!"

Her distress was great, and the tears appeared in her deep, dark eyes. He caught her up and kissed her hair, holding her close to him.

"My little Felicia!" he said huskily. "I 'fraid da time come when we must go; but, some time, mebbe, we come back to put da sweet flower on mama's grave."

"Oh, why should we go, papa?"

"Papa have great many enemy. Now da bad man

know him here da enemy may find out soon. Papa go 'way, so him not be hurt."

"Your cattle—what will you do with them?" asked Frank. "I suppose those are your cattle in the valley?"

"Yes, dem mine. I know way to drive dem out. I sell dem."

But still little Felicia was greatly distressed over the thought of going away and leaving her home. She knew no other home, and that one was very dear to her.

"Must we go, papa?" she sobbed. "Must we go?"

"I am 'fraid of dat," he nodded. "We find some place else to live."

"Again he saw the visitors looking at him curiously.

"You t'ink I do somet'ing wrong?" he cried. "I do not'ing but fight for liberty. I make enemies dat swear to kill me if da follow me to da hot place. At first I feel no fear of dem. Den da gov'ment pronounce me outlaw—put da price on me! I have to fly from my country. My enemy follow. I have to fight for my life. I kill one, two, t'ree. Dat make dem worse. All da relation swear to find me an' take my head to da gov'ment. I find myself hunted man night an' day. Den, at last, when I marry beautiful American wife, for her sake I have to find place

where we can live quiet. Den I come here, and we live here happy together."

It was an interesting and tragic story, and Merry did not doubt its truth. So this man, Juan Delores as he called himself, had been married to an American woman, who was the mother of Felicia.

Delores looked from one to the other of his visitors.

"You believe me?" he asked.

"Yes," said Frank, while Bart bowed.

"I tell you who I am," said the man. "Perhap' you have heard 'bout me."

He rose to his feet and stood there before them, looking proudly at them. There was in his pose now the manner of the born aristocrat. He smiled a little.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I am da Don Jose Maria Queypo de Llano Ruiz y de Saravia, of Spain!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MESSAGE RECOVERED.

Frank had heard of him, a Spanish refugee and outcast, a man of noble family, who had sacrificed himself and his fortune for what he firmly believed was right and justice.

"Count De Saravia!" exclaimed Frank.

"Yes," said the man.

Then he told them much of his story, and Felicia, who had known nothing of it herself, sat and listened in wondering silence. But what the count told did not clear up the mystery that puzzled Frank.

After the supper was over, they returned to the living-room, where Merry opened the piano and played. Little Felicia sang for them, and finally she crept into her father's arms and fell asleep. He carried her off to bed, and Merry and Bart turned and faced each other.

"Well?" said Hodge.

"Strange," said Merry. "But the haze remains as deep as ever."

"Deeper, if anything."

"I feel like getting some air," said Frank.

Hodge would have accompanied him when he rose

to go out, but instinct told Bart that Merry chose to be alone.

Frank passed along the deep wood path till he came to the open. The moon had risen in the east, and was shedding its silver radiance into Pleasant Valley. The little lake lay with a shimmering path of silver moonshine across it.

The scene was calm and peaceful enough. Frank stood on the edge of the shadowy woods and gazed upon the quiet valley. From far, far away came the cry of some prowling wild beast, but that was the only sound to break the calm of the peaceful night.

"She said the graves were up this way," Frank murmured. "I will see if I can find them."

After a time he came upon them. They were not far apart, with a great tree rising near at hand. One had a granite stone at its head, and on the stone had been crudely chiseled the name "Lucy."

Frank knew that was the grave of Felicia's mother. The other grave had been lately made, and no stone rose above it.

"My father rests here!" murmured Frank, as he knelt beside that mound.

For some minutes he remained there, tears starting from his eyes and trickling slowly down his cheeks.

"Poor father!" came softly from his lips. "You never knew what real peace and happiness meant.

Yours was a wild, strange life, and it seems fitting that you should die as you did. But, oh, what would I not have given to have been at your side! Perhaps I could have comforted you. To-morrow I will bring flowers and place upon this mound. A stone shall be erected, and here, dear father, you will sleep your long, last sleep. At last you have found the peace and rest that was denied you in life. God knows what is best, and He doeth all things well."

When he turned away he felt in no mood to return to the cabin at once, so he wandered down toward the shimmering lake, which seemed calling to him in the soft whispers of passing breezes. As he approached the lake, he passed beneath some wide-spreading trees, which gave a deep shadow.

Suddenly his attention was attracted by a moving object on the bosom of the lake. He paused and gazed, and the moonlight showed to him a canoe that seemed to be occupied by two persons. It was approaching the side of the lake on which Merry stood, and he could see the dripping paddle flash and shine in the moonlight.

Not a sound came from the canoe. There was no movement of either figure, save the swinging arms of the one in the stern, who plied the paddle.

Merriwell drew a little nearer to the shore, shielding himself carefully and waiting. When the canoe

was close in, he decided that it must contain the old Indian, Joe Crowfoot, and the strange boy.

Barely had the craft touched the shore when out from places of concealment leaped two men and flung themselves on the Indian and the boy. One of the men clutched the boy, who fought like a tiger-cat.

The other ruffian gave his attention to the old Indian, who whipped out a knife and met his attack. The man fired a shot, but the Indian closed in swiftly, as if not touched, and this forced the assailant to drop his revolver and bring forth a knife.

Then a deadly and terrible battle took place there on the shore of Lake Sunshine. The knives were heard to strike and grate together as the foes met, hand to hand and face to face.

It fascinated Merriwell, and, for the instant, he paused to stare at the spectacle. He saw the Indian's assailant was almost a giant, and a startling thought flashed through his mind:

"It's Gunnison Bill! I did not kill him, after all!"

"Now, redskin, I'm goin' ter carve yer up! I'll just rip yer inter ribbons in a minute!"

The voice was that of the big ruffian, and then Merry knew beyond a doubt that the man was Gunnison Bill.

A cry came from the lips of the boy, arousing Frank

from the strange lethargy that seemed to have seized him. Without a sound, the young athlete leaped toward the spot where the boy was doing his best in the struggle with the man who had clutched him.

"I think I'll take a hand here!" exclaimed Merry, as he sprang upon the man.

It was the companion of Gunnison Bill, who had escaped on Frank's mustang.

Startled by Merry's sudden appearance, the fellow whirled about, trying to fling the boy aside. The moonlight fell full on his face.

"Anton Mescal!" cried Merriwell exultantly. "At last I have found you!"

"Frank Merriwell!" gasped Mescal, for it was the scoundrel who had snatched the message from Merry in the New York hotel.

"Yes!" shouted Merry, as he fastened his hands upon the fellow. "I believed fate would bring us together here! Now I shall recover the message you stole from me!"

"Never! You'll have to kill me first!"

"Then I shall kill you!" came the cold, hard words from Frank's lips.

"Bill! Bill!" cried Mescal. "Help, Bill!"

"Bill is having his hands full," said Merry. "Old Joe Crowfoot is attending to him."

"He can kill that old dog in a minute!"

"Perhaps, but Old Joe may get in a few licks while he is doing it."

A fierce struggle between Frank and Mescal ensued. Mescal was no match for the young athlete, but he felt that he was fighting for all that he desired and held dear, so he put up a stiff struggle for a while. At last Merry forced the fellow to his knees, fastening a clutch on his throat.

"Give up?"

"Curse you—no!" hoarsely breathed Mescal.

Merry's fingers shut off the man's wind, and it seemed that the bones cracked beneath that pressure. Still the desperado fought to the last, though he gradually grew weaker and weaker.

Merry choked the man into insensibility. Having done this, he began to search his clothes for the message. In course of time he found it, within an inner pocket. Frank opened it and looked at it by the aid of the moonlight.

"Thank Heaven!" he said. "I have it again! This is the message my father wrote and sent to me."

He had been so absorbed that he was quite unaware of anything else that was taking place. Now, having thrust the message into his pocket, he rose and looked around.

To his amazement, the canoe, containing the old Indian and the boy, was gliding swiftly away over the

lake, while on the shore lay the bleeding body of Gunnison Bill. In the knife duel the ruffian had met more than his match in Old Joe, who had ended the career of the desperado. Gunnison Bill's life of evil-doing was over.

Frank called to the Indian and the boy, urging them to return, saying he was a friend; but they paid not the least heed, and the canoe kept on till it melted into the shadow along a distant shore.

Anton Mescal lay quite still on the shore, and Frank feared he had killed the fellow. On kneeling by the side of the scoundrel and feeling for his heart-beats, Merry found that life remained in Mescal's body.

"He'll recover," Merry decided. "I think I'll truss him up."

So he lifted Mescal and carried him up the bank to a large tree. The unconscious villain was placed in a sitting position on the ground, with his back against the tree, after which Merry stripped up the man's coat and bound him in that position.

Having disposed of Mescal thus, Frank hastened back toward the cabin home of Delores. On the way he met Hodge.

"I thought I heard a shot," said Bart. "Didn't know but you were in trouble, and that brought me out hot-foot."

Hodge was ready for anything.

"You did hear a shot," said Frank. "It was fired by Gunnison Bill."

"Gunnison Bill? Why, he's dead!"

"You are right; he is dead now; but we did not leave him dead in the timber over yonder, as we fancied."

"Didn't? What has happened, Merry? Tell me as quick as you can."

But Bart could scarcely believe the story Frank had to tell.

"You met Mescal there?" he exclaimed joyously; "and you have the message?"

"Safe in my pocket," said Frank. "I shall read it to-night."

"I told Delores I would go out and see what the shot meant. He remained to guard Felicia. Let's return and let him know there is no danger."

So they went to the cabin, where they found Delores waiting, rifle in hand, for anything that might occur. When he heard Merry's story he was even more excited than Bart.

"Mescal out there?" he panted. "Dat man must not git away! Take me to dat man! He know my secret, an' he be my enemy!"

It was not without serious misgivings that Merry led the way to the spot where the struggle had taken

place on the shore of the lake. He found an opportunity to whisper to Bart:

"Watch him! We can't stand by and see him murder Mescal, no matter what Mescal may have done."

But when they came to the tree where Frank had bound Mescal, they found the man had recovered, broken his bonds, and escaped.

Delores was like a hound on the scent, and he followed the trail till it ran into a piece of timber, where it was lost for the time.

"But I'll take it up in da morning!" declared the refugee. "He must make da fast track if he get away."

The body of Gunnison Bill they buried that night not far from where he fell.

And then, with Bart in the room where they were to sleep, Frank Merriwell brought forth and read the strange and startling message sent him by his dying father.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHAT THE MESSAGE CONTAINED.

That message gave Merriwell the greatest surprise of his life, for it told how Charles Conrad Merriwell, Frank's father, after his first wife's death, had married another woman, whom he met in the West. And it told how, by his second wife, Mr. Merriwell had had one son, Richard, who was thus a half-brother to Frank. But Mr. Merriwell had been hunted by his bitter enemy, Dion Santenel, and never had his life been anything but one of trouble and fear. It was not such a life as would make a wife happy and contented. Fearing Santenel might find his wife and strike him, through her, Mr. Merriwell had hidden her away in a safe retreat. But she was frail and delicate, and she had not survived.

The second Mrs. Merriwell was a sister to the wife of the man known as Juan Delores, and so to Juan Charles Merriwell took the motherless boy, Richard. Juan had raised Richard there in that hidden valley as if the boy were his own son, and there he had been happy and contented, with Felicia, his cousin, for his only playmate.

When fate had brought Charles Merriwell and his

first son together once more, the lips of the man remained sealed concerning a portion of his life. Thus it happened that Frank Merriwell had never suspected the existence of a half-brother.

But, when the end came, Charles Merriwell summoned strength to write a full confession. As he wrote it, he knew he had been followed about by men who sought to wrest from him in some manner his great fortune, or a portion of it, and it was his fear that they might succeed after he was dead.

He sent Delores to Denver for a reliable messenger to take the precious document to Frank. The messenger employed was a detective belonging to an agency in the city, and he executed his trust faithfully, for all that Anton Mescal, aware of his purpose, followed him all the way to the Atlantic coast, seeking to get possession of the precious document in the oil-skin envelope.

In the confession Charles Merriwell charged his son Frank to take care of Richard, bring him up properly, be both brother and father to him.

"He is a frail lad in some ways," wrote the dying man, "and he should be trained and built up until he possesses a marvelous physique, like your own, Frank. I give him into your hands for this task. He is your brother, and I charge you to make a man of him—such a man as you yourself have become. I am proud

of you, Frank, for you are a son to make any father proud. Dick is like you in some ways, but he is unlike you in many. He is wild, impulsive, passionate, and hard to govern; but I believe you can mold him into a splendid man.

"You know I am rich, and I leave all my wealth to be divided between you and Richard, in case you carry out my instructions faithfully. The will, which Juan Delores will give to you when you come to him with the word, will make everything clear. He will also turn over into your care your brother, Richard. I think there is no danger but you will be faithful to this duty I have left you, but, should you fail to take charge of Richard and care for him, you will see by the will that you are cut off from ever receiving a dollar of my wealth."

Frank felt a twinge of pain as he read this.

"Why did he have to write that?" he thought regretfully. "Ah! he did not know me well, or he would have been certain I would do everything in my power to carry out his instructions."

Later on in the message was given "the word" which Frank was to speak to Delores.

Hodge had seen enough to know how deeply Frank was touched, and he retired as quietly as possible, leaving Merry sitting there reading that astonishing revelation over and over again.

The night was far spent before Frank lay down to sleep. His slumber was filled with dreams, and more than once he murmured:

"Richard—Richard, my brother!"

* * * * * * *

In the morning Frank spoke "the word" to Juan Delores, saying:

"I have recovered the message that was stolen from me by Anton Mescal, and I have read it over and over. I wish to see my brother."

Delores bowed.

"You shall see him soon," he promised.

Then he went away somewhere, and, after a time, returned with the last will and testament of Charles Conrad Merriwell, which he placed in the hands of Frank.

"I was convinced last night," he said, "dat it b'long to you; but I had to swear to your father dat I never give it to any one who fail to bring da word. What could I do? I did not know. I t'ink I find some way to let you know da word after you give me all da proof dat you be Frank Merriwell."

"You have been faithful and true, Mr. Delores," said Merry, with a hand on the shoulder of the man. "I shall not forget. A Merriwell never forgets."

"Dat all right," asserted Juan, flushing. "But had

we foun' Mescal last night, I t'ink I would feel better now."

"I do not believe Mescal will trouble any of us again," said Frank. "It was his object to keep me from finding out what I was to do, so that I would not comply with the terms of the will. If I failed to take care of my brother, I was to have no part in the property left by my father. A false Richard might have been substituted, and there are a dozen schemes whereby Mescal could have profited had he succeeded, but he failed utterly, and now he will have to look out for himself."

At this moment Felicia, laughing gaily, appeared at the open door of the cabin, calling:

"Oh, Frank, come out!"

Merry had told her on the previous evening that she was to call him Frank.

"What do you want?" smiled Merriwell.

"Come and see," she urged. "I have a surprise for you. Oh, come quick!"

Laughing, he complied. She grasped him by the hand and led him round the cabin.

There, standing where the morning sunshine fell through an opening in the Black Woods, were two persons, an old and wrinkled Indian and a bright-faced, dark-eyed boy.

Frank was face to face with his brother!

CHAPTER XV.

A REBELLIOUS SPIRIT.

"Hee-haw! hee-haw! hee-haw!"

Rattle-ty-smash! rattle-ty-thump! thump! smash! thud!

"Hee-haw! hee-haw! hee-haw!"

"Oh, ha! ha! ha! ha! Ha! ha! ha!"

Pandemonium seemed to have suddenly broken loose just outside the window at which Frank was writing.

The braying hee-haw was followed by such a smashing, and crashing, and banging that it brought Merry to his feet immediately.

Then came a burst of wild, elfish boy laughter.

"What the dickens is he up to now?" exclaimed Frank, as he sprang to the window and looked out.

The sight that met his eyes was both amusing and surprising. To the tail of a small, long-eared burro, attached by means of a cord, hung an old tin can. And the burro was hee-hawing and kicking furiously in a mad endeavor to free himself from the thing which clattered and thumped about his heels.

On the ground, in a perfect paroxysm of delight, rolled Dick, from whose lips came the shrieks of elfish

laughter. It was two days since Frank had first met this, until then, unknown half-brother.

Wrapped in a dirty red blanket, sitting with his back against the wall of the cabin, was Old Joe Crowfoot, who calmly smoked his long-stemmed pipe, and regarded the youngster and the burro with the gravity of a stone image.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" shouted the boy. "Look at Billy! Kick it again, Billy! Oh, ha! ha! ha! Oh, ha! ha! ha!"

Billy kicked and rolled his eyes round at the persistent thing that came banging back against his heels. There was a comical look of mingled terror and anger in the eyes of the little burro. He plunged and leaped about in various attempts to get away from the rattling pail, which his heels had battered out of all semblance to its original shape.

"Ugh!" grunted the old Indian, and he gravely continued smoking, without moving hand or foot.

Then came a sudden, childish cry of distress, and round the cabin Felicia came running. She rushed straight toward the little burro.

"Oh, Billy! Billy!" she cried. "Who hurt my Billy? Stop, Billy! I'll take it off!"

Heedless of danger, fearless of the flying hoofs and plunging beast, she ran right up to the burro. A moment later she was knocked flat as the little animal

lunged round in its mad struggles to get away from the banging pail.

A leap carried Frank Merriwell out through the open window, and it seemed that another spring took him to the side of the child, which he caught up in his arms.

At the same moment the string broke and the burro sent the old can whizzing into the branches of a tree near at hand. Twice after this the heels of the excited little beast twinkled in the air, and then, seeming to realize that he had conquered at last, he let forth a triumphant bray.

The boy sprang up and stood quite still, all the laughter gone from his face.

"Are you hurt, Felicia?" asked Merry, as he held the girl in his strong arms.

"Oh, no, no!" she sobbed. "But my Billy is hurt! Put me down—please put me down!"

Frank did so, and she ran to the burro, clasping it round the neck and sobbing as she showered the now quiet little creature with caresses.

Still the old Indian remained motionless by the cabin wall, not even pulling a bit quicker at the pipe to betray that he had been disturbed or interested by what had happened.

Frank turned to the boy.

"Did you do it, Dick?" he asked.

"Do what?" said the boy, with a defiant air.

"Hitch that thing to Billy's tail."

"Yes; what if I did?"

Without retort to this, Merry again gave his attention to the girl, who was continuing to bestow caresses on the burro.

"Billy is not hurt, Felicia," he said gently. "Don't cry any more. Are you sure he didn't hurt you when he knocked you down?"

"Not much," was her assurance. "Just here some," pressing her hand to her side. "And here a little."

But when he pushed back her sleeve he found her arm was bruised and bleeding slightly.

At this moment, having been attracted by the rumpus, Juan Delores, the father of little Felicia, came hastily upon the scene. He was a man of few words, and it seemed that past experience must have told him who was to blame for what had happened, as he gave the dark-eyed boy a quick look, then lifted the child and carried her into the house.

"Dick," said Frank, to the boy, "I have something to say to you."

Again the lad gave him a defiant look, but did not speak.

"Come into the house," said Merry, as he started toward the door.

The boy did not stir. On the steps Merry turned and looked straight at the rebellious youngster.

"Dick!"

Their eyes met, and they stood thus for some moments, looking at each other.

"Come in!" said Frank, still keeping his eyes fastened on those of the boy.

It seemed that the lad was struggling to resist, but that, in spite of his desire to do otherwise, his power was not sufficient to combat that of the young man on the steps. Slowly at first, as if seeking to hang back, he advanced, and then he followed Frank into the cabin.

In a back room little Felicia could be heard sobbing, her father speaking an occasional kind word to her.

"Sit down, Dick," said Frank, pointing to a chair.

The boy hesitated, as if on the point of refusing, and then sat down, as directed.

Frank went to his chair at the table near the window. As he did so he glanced out through the window and saw the old Indian in exactly the same position as before, only it seemed he had moved a little nearer the window, as if he wished to hear what passed within that room.

Merry sat down, took up his pen, dipped it in the ink, and quietly finished the sentence he had been

writing when he was interrupted by the rumpus outside the window. The boy fidgeted nervously.

The sobbing of little Felicia gradually ceased in the back room; her father was heard to tell her that she was all right, and a few moments later she came running round the corner of the cabin, having passed out by the back door. She hastened straight to the burro, which she again hugged, and caressed, and kissed, calling the docile little beast all sorts of pet names.

All at once the boy jumped up from his chair, crying:

"If you're going to say anything to me, say it! I'm tired of sitting here, and I won't sit here any longer!"

Frank looked up, but Dick turned his eyes on the floor.

"Look at me," Merry commanded.

"I won't!" was the answer.

There was a moment of silence, and then Frank repeated:

"Look at me!"

Slowly those dark eyes were lifted till they met Frank's steady gaze. The boy caught his breath and stood quite still until Frank quietly said:

"Please sit down a moment longer, Dick, till I reach a place where I can stop conveniently."

The words were not a command, but they were

spoken as if Frank had no thought in the world that they would meet with a refusal; and, without waiting to note their effect, Merry resumed writing.

The boy sat down and remained quiet till Merriwell laid aside the pen, smiling.

"Come here, Dick," said Frank.

The boy rose and came to him.

Frank turned his head to look out of the window, which led the boy to look in the same direction, and he saw little Felicia still caressing the burro.

"You didn't know Felicia cared so much for Billy, did you, Dick?" asked Merry, smiling a bit.

The boy did not answer.

"Of course you didn't," Frank went on; "and it's very foolish of her. It's silly to care so much for a homely little donkey, and she ought to be punished for it."

"It isn't silly!" burst forth the boy warmly, his face flushing; "and she hadn't ought to be punished!"

"Do you really think so?" asked Merry, elevating his eyebrows slightly, and appearing surprised.

"Yes, I think so!" was the defiant answer.

"And you knew she cared so much for Billy?"

"Yes, I knew it."

"It can't be possible! Why, I thought you loved Felicia, your cousin!"

"I do!"

"Oh, I can't believe it, Dick—really I can't!"

"I do! I do!" cried the boy passionately. "Don't you dare say I don't!"

"But you like to give her pain?"

"No, I don't!"

"Strange! You have done so often within the past two days. You have done about everything you could think of that she would not like you to do, ending with hitching that old tin can to the heels of her burro, which nearly frightened Billy to death."

These words seemed to bring to the mind of the boy the picture of the wildly kicking burro, with his rolling eyes and comical aspect of terror and anger, and he suddenly burst into a peal of wild laughter. In a moment he was convulsed, and it almost seemed that he was on the point of falling and rolling on the floor, as he had rolled on the ground outside.

Beneath the window the old Indian continued smoking, but a grunt that seemed an expression of satisfaction came from his lips as he heard that burst of laughter.

Frank did not laugh, but sat there quietly, betraying no effort to remain grave, until the lad had ceased to give expression to his merriment.

It must be confessed, however, that Merry found it no easy task to keep a sober face through that

burst of laughter, about which there seemed something strangely infectious.

When the boy had quieted down somewhat, Frank quietly said:

"You must have forgotten the climax. Felicia, in her anxiety for Billy, ran out, was knocked down and hurt. She might have been killed. But what do you care? You laugh."

"I do care! I do care!" panted the lad, all the laughter gone from his face now. "Billy had no right to hurt her! I'll kill him if he does it again!"

"Then you think Billy was to blame? Of course there was nothing to cause Billy's actions? The old tin pail that was hitched to his tail had nothing to do with it?"

The boy's dark eyes looked Frank full and fearlessly in the face, but his face flushed. He was quick to discern the trap into which Merry was luring him, and, like a flash, he asked:

"Were you ever a boy?"

"Oh, yes," smiled the young athlete; "I believe I was once on a time."

"Did you ever have any fun?"

"Lots of it."

"But you never played any pranks, did you?"

Merry smiled again, seeing how the lad was seeking to turn the tables on him.

"Yes," Frank confessed unhesitatingly, "I have, and some of them I afterward regretted. I want you to profit by my experience. I know how much you think of Felicia, yet you did not pause to consider that while you were having sport with her donkey, Billy, you might give her pain. There is such a thing as harmless fun, Dick. This prank of yours, like most of the pranks you play, caused somebody pain. You are my brother, Dick, and I want you to be a little more careful."

"How do I know I'm your brother? My father never told me anything about you—that is—until——"

Frank's clear eyes had disconcerted the boy, causing him to hesitate and falter in the declaration he had started to make.

"He told you about me before he died," said Frank positively. "He told you how my mother was his first wife, which made us half-brothers, and he also told you that I would come to take you and care for you."

"I don't want you to take me! I won't let you take me! I am satisfied here, and I'm going to stay here! You shall not take me away!"

This was defiance and opposition in earnest, but the boy could not see that it produced any effect on the quiet-eyed young man who sat before him.

"When you understand it better, Dick," said Merry, "you will be quite willing to do as father desired."

"I won't! I know what you want. You want to take me away where there are big towns and lots of people and every boy has to go to school. I don't want to go to school. I can learn all I want to know without going to school."

"You think you can, but you would be sure to find out your mistake when you grew up and became a man. Next to health, education is the most valuable possession in the world."

"Next to health! Why, Old Joe says white folks in the big towns make their boys and girls go to school till they get weak and sickly and lose their health. He says the white boys in towns study till their chests are flat, and they cough, and their eyes are weak, and they have to wear glasses, and they have no muscles, and they never become real men at all. I'll never do that! I can read and write and figure. That is enough education of that kind. Now Old Joe is teaching me all he knows, and he knows more than any white man who ever lived."

"I see Old Joe has given you some false ideas, Dick," said Frank quietly, as he stood up. "Take a look at me. I was brought up in the white man's school. Am I flat-chested? Have I a cough? Are my eyes weak?"

The boy regarded Frank searchingly and silently

for some moments, and then into his dark eyes came a look of lofty scorn, as he said:

"You're a tenderfoot!"

Frank laughed outright.

"Is that why you have taken such an aversion to me?" he exclaimed.

"That's one thing."

"What's another?"

"You want to boss me."

"Is that all?"

"I won't be bossed by you. I won't do as you say! Even if you are my brother, you can't make me do just as you want to!"

Under the window the old Indian smoked on, apparently unhearing or unheeding.

"Dick," said Merry, "I shall not try to make you do anything that will be to your harm."

"You can't make me do anything, whether it's to my harm or not!"

Frank decided that he had been incautious in letting the word "make" pass his lips. He realized that this passionate, impulsive lad must be governed by reason, and that it would not do to try to drive him. Dick's proud spirit would rebel against being driven, even though he knew the object was for his own good.

"You must see from me that not all boys who attend schools lose their health. In fact, the best schools

to-day have gymnasiums and training-rooms where the students can work every day to become strong, just as they study to get an education. And all over the country boys are at work educating their bodies while they educate their minds. I have lots to tell you, Dick, about their games and their contests of strength and skill. I will tell you about baseball, foot-ball, and other games."

"I don't want to hear! What do I care? I shall never play any of those games."

"You may some time."

"Never! I have made up my mind. They are silly, and I will not play them."

"When you get older you will learn that it is bad policy to form a conclusion or a resolve in regard to anything you know nothing about."

"I know enough about those games. Only white boys play them."

"You are mistaken. At Carlisle there is a school of Indian boys, and those young Indians learn to play baseball and football. Every year the Carlisle base-ball and football-teams grow stronger and more diffi-cult to defeat. They play with all the great college teams, and they enter into the games with a certain wild joy and fierceness that make the contests seem at times like life-and-death struggles. You should see

the Carlisle football-team come onto the field. Eleven big, bronzed fellows come trotting out in a bunch upon the gridiron, the chalk-marks of which look like a skeleton bleaching in the sun.

"They have long, coal-black hair and flashing eyes. They have been trained till they are fit to do their level best. All around that chalk-marked field rise great wooden stands, containing tier after tier of human beings, packed in as thick as they can be, gathered there from hundreds upon hundreds of miles to witness the game. As the Indians come trotting out they are given a great cheer from their admirers, both red and white.

"A football, like a huge yellow egg, is tossed out on the ground and the Indians begin to chase it about and fall on it to warm up. While they are at this there comes another cry, and onto the field comes the team of the white players. Then in front of those great tiers of seats men rise and give signals with waving arms. At those signals the great multitude breaks into a mighty cheer for the white contestants. Soon the game is ready to begin. The men line out on the field, scattering and spreading to their positions.

"The whites have their first kick at the ball, which has been placed on a certain spot, and the best kicker

on the team stands off and gets ready. A great hush falls on the people, who lean forward, lips parted, eyes staring, waiting for the moment. Slowly and with steady steps the kicker advances on the ball, while the players, to the last man, crouch, ready to leap forward. The leg of the kicker swings back, then forward, and—plunk!—his toe strikes the ball, which leaps up from the ground and sails away, away, away, over the heads of the Indians.

"At the same instant the white players dash down the field after the ball. Two of them run faster than all others, darting past the first Indians who get in their path, and reach the spot where the ball is coming down. But they cannot touch it again till it has been touched by an Indian. One of the red men's swiftest runners is under it, ready to catch it. It falls into his hands and he holds it, instantly springing forward to carry it toward the white players' territory. One of the whites leaps at him to clasp him and bring him down, but, without using his hands, another Indian player gets in front of the white and blocks him off. The crowd roars. The runner with the ball dashes forward. Another white is after him. Both run like antelopes. The white cannot gain. But past the Indians who try to stop him comes another white, who hurls himself headlong like an arrow through the air, clasping the Indian about the legs, and down they

come to the ground in a flash. On top of them leap five or six players, like famished wolves, pinning them there.

"The great crowd is standing now, and from every throat goes up a shriek, a yell, or a roar, till a mighty volume of sound leaps to the sky. The players quickly get up. The ball is placed just where it was held when the Indian was brought down by the white. Then those players pack together in two close masses, facing each other, crouching, looking into one another's eyes. Just a moment. Then the ball is lifted, passed back, and an Indian goes leaping and plunging right into the midst of the compact mass of white players, pushed and jammed and hurled forward by every man of his own side that can help him, while his friends block off the whites with their bodies. But the whites can use their hands, and they hurl the Indians aside, grapple the one with the ball, down him again.

"The whites have kept their red rivals from making a gain, and once more the great roar goes up from the crowd. But next time a man grasps the ball and goes darting and leaping round one end of the bunch of players. He dodges two who hurl themselves at him, he escapes the tacklers, and away he races down the field, with every man after him, like coyotes running down a wild horse. One gains, gets close, springs, and again the man with the ball goes down, with man

after man jumping on him to pin him fast. Flags are waving, men are roaring, women are screaming. A band is playing, but the thundering of the crowd drowns it. The players rise again. Again they crouch, ready for the next struggle, and——"

"But I forgot that you do not care for this, Dick. Of course, you do not want to hear about anything so silly, and I'll stop."

"Don't stop!" cried the boy breathlessly. "Go on! Tell me some more."

Then, as Frank did not resume at once, he stamped his foot, almost shouting:

"Go on! I must hear it! I will hear it! Tell me some more."

Frank knew he had won a point, but he did not betray satisfaction. However, he compelled Dick to beg for a continuance, and then went on with his thrilling account of a football-game, which he made more thrilling as he advanced.

Merry knew how to play on the feelings of this spirited, high-strung lad, and he had Dick throbbing with breathless excitement as he pictured the tide of battle rolling back and forth over the football-field.

When Merry permitted, in his fanciful recital, the Indians to score the first touch-down and goal, Dick actually danced with joy.

"I knew it!" he cried. "I knew the Indians, who lived in the open air, could beat the whites, who spend their days in schools."

"But the game is not over yet," said Merry.

He continued, turning the tables with skill, till he showed how, by superior generalship, the whites finally defeated their red antagonists. In order to hold the interest of the boy to the last, he was forced to make the game very close, but the whites finally won.

"I don't believe they could do it!" said Dick indignantly.

"But they do do it," said Frank. "Of course, the Carlisle boys win sometimes, but they cannot defeat the great colleges, like Yale and Harvard."

"Then they are not used fairly. The white men never did use the Indians right."

"Old Joe has found you an apt pupil," observed Merry. "It is true that in many things the red men have been unfairly treated, but not in football. When you go East with me, I'll take you to see some of the games."

The dark eyes of the lad sparkled for a moment, and then he said:

"I'm not going East. I had rather stay here."

"You will change your mind about that later. In fact, I am sure you will."

"I'll not leave Felicia and Old Joe."

"That is loyal of you, Dick. It shows the spirit of constancy to your friends, and a fellow who is not constant to his friends is a very poor chap, indeed."

"Perhaps," said the boy, "I might go just to see what the East is like, if I didn't know you'd want me to go into one of those schools. I'll not do that, because I want to be healthy and strong."

Frank smiled.

"Do I look unhealthy?" he asked.

"N-no; but I don't believe you could stand it to live like a cow-puncher."

"Don't you?"

"Of course you couldn't! No tenderfoot could."

This time Merry laughed outright. The wisdom of the boy was amusing.

"Well, we'll not argue about that; but you can see that I am not weak-eyed, flat-chested, or sickly. Yet when I was a year or two younger than you I was weak and sickly, so that there were fears concerning my ability to ever become strong and sturdy. I began to train to acquire strength and health. I kept at it persistently, and the improvement in a few months was surprising. At your age I was stronger than you are now."

A look of indignant contradiction flashed over the expressive face of the boy.

"I do not believe it!" he flatly declared.

"It is true," said Frank. "When I entered the military school at which I fitted for college I was something of an athlete, but while at that school I made the greatest progress. It was there that I really became an athlete of some consequence."

Still it was plain the boy was not convinced.

"That school," continued Merry, "is one of the best in the country for boys who need building up in body as well as mind. Since I left it vast improvements have been made there. When a student enters now he is compelled to pass a physical examination at the hands of a competent professor, and all his weak points are noted and recorded. Every day he is required to spend a certain length of time in the gymnasium building up those weak points and strengthening himself generally. For this very reason Fardale Military Academy is turning out vigorous, healthy young chaps, who are well prepared for the strain of study and competition during their college careers; or, if he does not enter college, he is ready to begin the battle of life with a stout heart and plenty of stamina to meet all sorts of hardships.

"It's no use to talk to me," said the boy stubbornly. "I don't want to go to school, and I'm not going."

"I didn't know you were afraid!" exclaimed Merry, as if greatly disappointed.

"Afraid?" cried Dick. "Who's afraid?"

"You must be."

"Of what?"

"You must be afraid to have your weak spots discovered. You are a trifle hollow just in front of your shoulders, and your neck is not quite large enough at the base. You would have to train at Fardale to correct these weaknesses."

Dick's eyes flashed with angry indignation.

"I am not afraid of anything of the sort!" he asserted.

"Oh, then you do not care to become as strong as the boys who graduate from Fardale Academy?"

"I don't care anything about your old academy!" cried Dick, his cheeks burning and his hands clenched. "I don't believe your stories about great college athletes. I know you're not weak, but I'll bet others are."

"Hodge is another. You have seen him."

"Well, that's only two; and I don't believe you two are equal to Western men."

"All my friends," said Merriwell, "are strong and athletic. You may have an opportunity to see another one of them when Hodge gets back from Denver. He has gone there to meet one of my college

chums, who has come West to spend the summer vacation. I have written to several others, and, unless I am much disappointed, you'll have an opportunity of seeing what sort of fellows they are before very long."

"I don't care anything about them," said Dick sulkily.

"Then I'll make you care about them," was Frank's quiet assertion.

"You can't!" cried the boy, all his spirit of opposition awakened instantly. "You can't make me do anything!"

The look on Frank's face was one of quiet confidence, and it seemed to anger the boy more than words, for it plainly told him that Merry had not the least doubt about succeeding in his object.

Still into Dick's mind there had crept a fear that somehow this handsome, confident brother of his possessed strength of will sufficient to conquer him, and this thought made him desperate, so that he was tempted to exhaust his powers of resistance, just as a wild bird beats out its strength against the iron bars of its cage.

"You may go now, Dick," said Merry quietly.

The boy did not stir, but stood there looking at him with those defiant black eyes.

Merry, however, sat down and resumed his writing,

just as if Dick had left the room; nor did he give the lad the least attention.

After a time the boy stole silently out of the room, and, despite himself, into his heart there stole a sense of defeat—a growing knowledge that he had encountered a master mind.

CHAPTER XVI.

DICK AND OLD JOE.

Having been reared in that wild section, and permitted to have his own way in almost everything, Dick Merriwell had developed into a high-spirited lad who fretted like an unbroken mustang beneath the bit of restraint. To him the thought of giving in to the will of another was repugnant, even though the wishes and plans of that other might be for his own good.

Little did he know that, to a certain extent, the evidences of pride and spirit he had betrayed had given his brother considerable satisfaction. Little did he know that he had convinced Frank that there was in him the making of something out of the ordinary.

Such, however, was the case. Frank would have been keenly disappointed had he found his brother lacking in spirit and determination. Having found the boy as he was, Merry was studying him and seeking to discover the best manner to successfully lead Dick on to his own good. Merry realized that the task might prove rather difficult, but this gave it all the more fascination and interest for him.

Having left Frank, Dick passed out of the cabin and walked slowly away. When he had passed beneath the thick shadows of some trees he felt a touch on his shoulder, and turned to find Old Joe close behind him.

"Gracious!" exclaimed the boy. "I didn't know you were following. I didn't hear you."

"Little Hurricane keep him ear open," grunted the old fellow. "Joe teach him to hear."

"I know, Joe, but I was thinking, and I forgot."

"Must never forget if um want to be like red man."

"But—but something happened to make me forget."

"Heap bad!"

"You are right, Joe. It was careless of me."

"Heap much," nodded the Indian. "Joe him teach Little Hurricane to hear snake in grass, bird in air, panther on moss—everything."

"Yes, yes, you have taught me all that, Joe; but it is Indian lore, and sometimes I forget myself and know no more than a white man."

"Must never forget," repeated Old Joe. "Heap bad! Some time enemy he ketch um when um have forget."

"But it was enough to make anybody forget. My brother——"

"Joe know; him hear."

"You heard?"

"Ugh!" was the affirmative grunt of the old fellow. "Me hear. Set under window; hear everything."

"Well, what do you think of it, Joe? He means to boss me, Joe! He sha'n't."

"Him heap big boss."

"What do you mean by that?"

The Indian squatted on the ground, with his back against a tree.

"Down," he said.

The boy flung himself on the ground, resting his head on one elbow and looking into his companion's wrinkled face. They were quite alone, where no one could see them, yet the eyes of the Indian turned swiftly from side to side, and his ears seemed to be lifted, like those of a listening catamount.

Dick remained perfectly quiet and waited.

"Him heap big boss," repeated Old Joe, after some moments. "Him have way."

"I don't understand."

"Him have way to make all do as him say."

"He can't make me do as he says! I'll never give up to him!"

The Indian shook his head.

"Little Hurricane him think so now."

"I know it! I won't let him be my boss!"

"Old Joe him see something in Steady Hand's eye."

"You call my brother Steady Hand?"

"Ugh! Him eye heap strong. Old Joe look into it. Heap strong to make everybody do way him want."

"I don't care! He can't do it with me! I won't let him!"

"Think so now; think not so bimeby."

"Never!" panted the boy. "Why, Joe, he wants to take me away!"

"Joe know."

"He wants to put me into school."

"Joe know."

"He would make me just like any other boy."

"Little Hurricane have to go."

"You're crazy, Joe! I tell you I won't, and he can't make me! I shall stay here with you—and Felicia."

Again the Indian shook his head.

"Steady Hand him strong mind; make you do way him want," asserted the old fellow positively. "Him have strength to do so in him eye. Him know way to do it."

The face of the boy paled now, for he placed implicit confidence in anything the old Indian said.

"Then I'll kill myself!" he panted, springing up. "I won't let him boss me! I'll kill myself first!"

"Down," said Old Joe, with a gesture, and, all un-

conscious that he was obeying a master, the boy dropped to the ground again.

For some moments the aged Indian was silent, looking fixedly at the lad.

"Mebbe it be better," he said.

"What are you talking about?" demanded Dick. "Maybe what will be better?"

"For you to do same Steady Hand want."

"You're crazy!" again asserted the boy. "I can't do it! I will not be shut up in any old school. I love the open air and the freedom of the mountains and plains! I love to wander alone in the deep forest and listen to its murmuring voice. The trees talk to me, Joe, and all the wild creatures know me. Do you think I am fool enough to give this up for a stifling schoolroom and the study of books that will make my head ache and make me weak? I tell you I will kill myself first!"

The face of the Indian remained grave and expressionless, but there was a twinkle of pride and satisfaction in his keen old eyes.

"You have Injun heart," he said. "You skin white; heart Injun."

"I'm not a fool, and I won't let him make me one!"

"Then only one thing um can do."

"What is it? Tell me, Joe!"

"Go 'way."

Dick caught his breath.

"Go away?"

"Ugh!"

"Where?"

"Anywhere."

"You mean to run away?"

"Ugh!"

"And leave Felicia?"

"Some time um come back. Steady Hand take um, um never come back."

"Run away—alone?"

"Old Joe him don't have to stay."

The face of the boy flushed, and he panted:

"You will go—you'll go with me, Joe?"

"Ugh! Joe him 'bout ready to go. Him tired stay here."

"And you will take me with you—where?"

"Prairie big, mountains deep," was the answer.

"And they will not be able to find us?"

"Never find Old Joe."

"I'll do it!" the boy suddenly decided. "Joe, I'll go with you anywhere to get away from him. And we'll go this very night!"

Old Joe Crowfoot returned to his seat by the cabin wall and resumed his smoking, apparently perfectly contented.

Dick wandered away by himself, passing through

the woods, which led down to the shore of Lake Sunshine.

The boy was happy again, believing that he was going to remain his own master and live the wild, free life that he loved, so he whistled as he passed through the woods. His whistling was like the warbling of a mocking-bird, full of liquid sweetness and trills, and soon he was answered from the branches overhead, where the flit of wings could be seen. He was calling the birds in their own language, and they were answering. The strange notes that came from his pursed lips were marvelous to hear, and the birds came flying after him, flitting from tree to tree.

By the shore of the lake he found a comfortable spot beneath a wide-spreading tree, and there he flung himself on the ground, continuing his birdlike calls. The birds gathered on the branches above him, looking down at him with fearless curiosity.

A squirrel chattered not far away, and immediately the sound was perfectly imitated by the boy, who added to it the call that the squirrel makes to its mate. Soon the handsome little fellow came leaping from limb to limb of the trees until he had reached the one beneath which the boy rested. Then, by fits and starts, he descended to the ground and approached the lad. In a few moments Dick had called the wild squirrel of the woods to his knee.

Then down from the tree dropped a bird, alighting on Dick's shoulder. The other birds drew nearer and nearer until nearly all were gathered on the lower branches of the tree.

Behold Dick Merriwell, the wild, strange boy of this mountain valley, in all his glory, king of the birds. This is the life that appeals to him and to which he clings. This is what he declines to forsake for school or any of the advantages which Frank Merriwell has offered to give him.

Dick laughed and talked to the squirrel, his voice low, soft, and musical. The squirrel whisked his tail over his back and looked the lad fearlessly in the face. A jealous bird darted down at the squirrel and compelled the little animal to hop from the boy's knee.

"Oh, ha, ha, ha!" laughed Dick softly. "Quarreling, are you? Stop it—stop it this minute! There's room enough for you both. No need to be jealous. Frank tells about his friends. What are his friends compared to mine! I would not give up my friends for all of his."

For some time he remained there, with his wild friends about him. At last, a voice was heard calling through the woods:

"Dick! Dick! Where are you, Dick?"

The squirrel started up in a listening attitude, while two or three of the birds flew away at once.

"Dick! Oh, Dick! Where are you?"

It was the voice of Felicia.

"She won't hurt you," said the boy, to the squirrel and the birds. "You need not be afraid of her."

The little girl was heard coming through the woods, and more of the birds took alarm, quickly darting away on silent wings.

"Here, Felicia—here I am," answered Dick.

The squirrel did not stop longer. With a flirt of its tail, it bounded to the trunk of the tree, up which it scampered.

Felicia came running toward the tree, but when she got there the squirrel was gone and not a bird remained.

This seemed strange enough, for surely Felicia was the more gentle of the two in appearance, and she was so tender-hearted that for the world she would not harm the weakest creature in all creation.

But about the boy there was a certain quality that few human beings possess—a magnetism that attracted the wild things of nature. He had listened to the voices of these creatures and learned their calls. He had watched them till he knew all their ways. And his heart went out to them in sympathy, for their wild, free life seemed to him the perfect life.

"I didn't know where you were, Dick," said little

Felicia, her dark eyes full of gladness because she had found him.

"I didn't think you'd care," said Dick.

"Care?" she cried, flinging her arms about his neck and kissing him. "Why, how can you say that? What do you mean? You know, Dick—you know how much I love you!"

"After—after I did—that?"

"What?"

"You know—to Billy?"

"Oh, yes, Dick—yes! I know you didn't mean to hurt Billy."

"It didn't hurt him, Felicia."

"But it frightened him."

"I couldn't help it," the boy declared. "He was standing there asleep. I found the old tin can, and I thought what fun it would be to hitch it to his tail. Then I got a string, tied it to the pail, made a loop, and slipped it onto Billy's tail."

"It's a wonder Billy didn't kick you."

"He would if anybody else had tried the trick, but I don't suppose he thought I'd do such a thing. I betrayed Billy's confidence in me."

"You won't do it again, will you, Dick?"

"No. I wouldn't have done it then if I'd stopped to think how much you would care."

"Oh, you dear Dick!"

She gave him a loving hug.

"But it was awfully funny!" he cried, his laughter beginning to bubble up within him. "Oh, you should have seen Billy when I let the old thing bang against his heels! Oh, dear! how he did jump! Oh, my! how he did kick! Then be brayed and kicked, and the old pail came banging back against his heels every time. And he rolled his eyes round at it and looked so comical—so comical! Oh, ha! ha! ha! Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!"

The elfish laughter of the strange lad filled the forest with its merry sound. Convulsed with merriment over the remembrance, Dick lay on the ground and clung to his sides, while Felicia stood near, compelled to laugh despite herself.

"Oh, you're so happy, Dick!" she said.

Quick as a flash the laughter stopped and the merriment left his face.

"I'm not happy!" he said, sitting up.

"Not happy?" she gasped.

"No, I'm miserable!" he declared.

"Oh, dear!" cried Felicia. "Is it anything I have done?"

"No, no! It's him!"

"Him?"

"My brother."

"Frank?"

"Yes."

"What has he done?"

"I hate him!"

"Did he punish you?"

"I guess not! You don't think he'd dare? But I hate him!"

"Oh, Dick! you mustn't forget that he is your brother!"

"I don't care! What right has he to be my brother? I don't want a brother! All I want is you, Felicia!"

"Oh, you mustn't talk that way! It's wrong!"

"I don't care if it is! Do you know what he wants to do? Well, he wants to take me away—away from you!"

She gave a little cry and clung to him.

"He wants to put me in an old school. I'm not going to school, for I know enough of that kind of learning now."

"You'll have to do what he says."

"Don't you think so! He can't make me do it! He'll find that he can't!"

"It was in your papa's will."

"That doesn't make any difference; I won't do it, just the same."

"What can you do?"

"I am going to run away!" answered the boy promptly. "I'm going off where he can't follow, and he'll never get me—never, never, never!"

CHAPTER XVII.

AWAKENED JEALOUSY.

Little Felicia uttered a cry of horror, her face paling.

"Oh, no, no, Dick!" she exclaimed, getting hold of him with both hands. "You don't mean that! Why, I'll never see you again! Oh, Dick! Dick!"

She was filled with fear and distress at the thought, and she clung to him as if afraid that he would start at once.

"Oh, but you will see me again!" he quickly declared. "That is why I am running away. It's so, after he is gone, I can come back to you."

"But where will you go? Where can you go?"

"Old Joe knows. I have been with him before. He will take care of me."

"Old Joe? Then he——"

"Is going with me. You mustn't tell, Felicia. We are going away this night."

"Oh, so soon?"

"The sooner the better. I can't stay here, for I will not let that man be my master."

"Oh, but you do not have to go so soon! He

doesn't wish to take you away from here yet. You may stay with me a little longer, Dick."

"No one knows when he may make up his mind to take me away. He wants to carry me away off to the East, and put me into a school, where I know I should die. It is dangerous to wait, Felicia."

The girl fell to sobbing, and he put his arm about her.

"There, there!" he said, in a soft and soothing voice. "Don't cry about it, dear cousin—please don't. I'll come back to you—I swear it! Before long I will be a man, and then he can't take me from you. I'll stay with you always then."

He soothed her after a little, kissing away the tears.

"But you must promise not to tell a soul about what I am going to do," he suddenly said. "He must not know it, for he would try to stop me."

"If he should——"

"He'd better not try it!" panted the boy, his dark eyes flashing. "I am going with Old Joe away into the mountains, and he can never find me. After a while he will get sick of hunting for me, and then he'll go away. Joe will know when he goes away, and I'll come back here to you."

Her face brightened a little.

"Oh, I'm so glad you'll come back! But do you think it is right?"

"What?"

"Running away."

"What's the difference?"

"He is so good, and—and I can't help—liking him, Dick."

"That's the way. Once or twice I've almost felt that way, but I won't let myself. I know what he means to do with me, and I just won't like him!"

"But perhaps what he means to do would be for your good, Dick. Other boys go to school, and——"

"Some do, and some don't! Old Joe says those who don't are better off than those who do."

"Do you suppose Old Joe knows?"

"Of course he does!" exclaimed the boy confidently. "Old Joe taught me to call the birds and the beasts. He taught me to follow a trail and to shoot and do many things that no boy ever learns in school. He is a better teacher than all the schoolmasters in the whole world."

"But some time you may have to do things that Old Joe does not understand, and then——"

"Never, for I'm going to live my whole life away from the big towns. You shall live with me, Felicia, and we'll be just as happy as—as the birds. Now listen—to-night, when everything is still, I am going. Old Joe will be waiting for me over by the big Black Rock. When morning comes, and they find I am

gone, we shall be so far away that no one can catch us. Then I want you to tell them that I ran away because I would not let my brother be my master. Will you tell them that, Felicia?"

"Yes, Dick—I'll do anything for you."

"Dear Felicia! Be brave, and I'll come back to you. Don't tell that I'm ever coming back, because then he might stay and watch for me. That would simply keep me away, for I shall know how long he stays and when he goes. If you wish me to return soon, don't tell."

She promised that she would not, though in her heart she felt that she was doing something wrong. For him, however, she would do it. He was the only playmate she had ever known, and she thought him the most wonderful boy in all the world.

Sometimes Felicia had sat quite still at a distance and watched Dick call the birds and the tiny wild things of the woods about him, delighted and amazed by his power. But when she had tried to approach they had fled; when she sought to call them they would not respond. She could not understand the mystery of it, but in her mind was the conviction that Dick was like the wild creatures that approached him without fear, and now it seemed wrong for any one to think of taking him from the scenes he loved and placing him in a school.

"I'll think of you every day when I'm away, Felicia," he promised.

"And I'll think of you, Dick," she murmured. "When I say my prayers at night I'll pray for you."

"Dear little Felicia!" he exclaimed again. "We won't let my bad brother separate us."

"Oh, I do not think he is bad, Dick—I can't think that! He is handsome, and he has such a good face!"

A strange light appeared in the eyes of the lad, while he flushed hotly.

"He knows how to fool people," said Dick; "but I know he's bad."

"No, no!" cried Felicia. "He has held me on his knee and told me stories and talked to me. You are wrong, Dick. He is not bad."

"He is! he is!" panted the boy, in a sudden burst of jealousy. "Don't ever let him take you on his knee again, Felicia!" He grasped her by the wrists and glared into her startled eyes. "Promise me that you will not let him take you on his knee again. Promise! promise!"

She was frightened by his sudden fierceness, and the clutch on her wrists caused her to cry out with pain:

"Oh, oh! you are hurting me! I'll promise; only don't hurt me!"

Her face paled and showed her pain, which struck

him to the heart with remorse. Instantly he released her wrists and clasped his arm about her, saying pleadingly:

"Forgive me, please forgive me! I didn't mean to hurt you—truly, I didn't! But it made me mad to think about you sitting on his knee, and I didn't know what I was doing. Oh, say I did not hurt you much!"

He kissed her wrists and showered her with caresses, his manner full of passionate devotion.

"You hurt just a little," she declared bravely; "but it was only for a minute. It's all gone now—now you have kissed it, Dick."

"If you knew how I hate to leave you even for a little while!" he exclaimed.

"If you knew how I hate to have you go!" she breathed.

"My brave, sweet little cousin!" he said, with the air of a manly lover. "But you must not sit on Frank's knee, and you must keep away from him as much as you can. Promise me that you will do as I ask."

"Oh, I'll promise, Dick!"

"Don't look at him when he talks to you—don't look into his eyes. If you do, he will get the best of you, for there is something in his eyes that it is

hard to resist. I don't know what it is, but I have felt it."

He led her to make many promises of the sort, and she did so, though she knew it would be difficult for her to keep some of them.

"There!" he exclaimed, in satisfaction; "he'll find he cannot master me! He'll find he cannot force me to the school that makes cowards and weak men."

"But he is no coward," asserted Felicia. "You should have seen him fight the ruffian who was carrying me off the day he first came into this valley. That man was a giant, and he was strong and fierce; but Frank grappled with him, grasped his wrist when he tried to use his knife, threw him, and knocked him senseless. Oh, he must be awfully strong!"

Again Dick was green with jealousy.

"Bah!" he cried. "The ruffian must have been drunk. Don't tell me any more about it! In a few years I will be able to handle him. Now we will go back to the house, and you must be careful in your actions not to do anything that will make any one suspect what is going to happen. You will be careful?"

"Yes, Dick. What am I to do?"

"Act just as you always do—not differently. Be happy."

"I'll try."

"Don't speak a word about it near the house. Don't let Old Joe know that I have told you."

She promised, and they started for the cabin, walking hand in hand through the woods. They came to the path after a while, along which they made their way.

Just before they came within sight of the cabin, Felicia suddenly stopped and flung her arms about Dick's neck, brokenly exclaiming:

"Oh, Dick! how can I let you go away to-night—how can I? I shall lay wake and think about it! I shall know when you meet Old Joe at Black Rock! I shall see you stealing away together! I shall see you hurrying into the mountains!"

"Hush!" he said. "You must not speak of it again till I am gone. We are too near the house."

"Kiss me good-by!" she half-sobbed.

They exchanged kisses, and then they romped away toward the cabin, like thoughtless children. And Dick's laugh rang loudly through the woods—the wild, elfish laughter that was characteristic of him.

Beside the cabin Old Joe Crowfoot smoked in grim silence.

But within the cabin Frank Merriwell was no longer writing. His chair and table were deserted, and he was gone.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN INTERRUPTED DEPARTURE.

The night was still and serene, with a large round moon, clear as burnished silver, shedding its light down into Pleasant Valley. Away to the west stood the ragged mountains, with the stars gleaming bright above their snow-capped peaks.

In the Black Woods the shadows were dense. The moonlight sifted down and fell on the front of the little cabin, but the rear of the cabin was in darkness. From the back door moved a form that made no noise, but hastened away as lightly as possible, slipping round into the path. Before plunging into the woods, the form paused and turned back to the cabin, toward which a kiss was tossed.

"Good-by, home! good-by, Felicia!" murmured Dick Merriwell, for Dick it was. "I am driven out, but I'll come back when he is gone. I am free as the birds, and free I will remain. Good-by."

Then he turned his back on the cabin and hastened noiselessly along the path.

When he thought how amazed Frank would be in the morning he felt like dancing and shouting with delight.

"Oh, I'd like to see his face!" he chuckled. "It would be such fun! It would be more fun than it was to see Billy roll his eyes round at the old pail."

When he came to the edge of the woods he did not hesitate to step out into the moonlight, for now there was no fear in his heart that any one save Old Joe would see him.

Straight toward Black Rock, at a little distance from the shore of the lake, he hastened. There were some trees near the rock, and Dick fancied the old Indian was waiting in their shadows.

At some distance from the rock Dick paused and gave the hoot of the horned owl. Immediately, from a point near the rock, the howl of a coyote rose and quavered on the still night air.

"Joe is there!" laughed the boy. "He is waiting, and all is well."

Then he ran forward. Near the rock a figure rose to meet him. It was Crowfoot.

"Ugh!" grunted the Indian. "You come. Old Joe think it time."

"I waited till I was sure everybody was asleep," said Dick. "Besides, I was bound to let him know he was not my master and that I had beaten him."

"What you do?"

"I wrote on a slip of paper, 'Good-by, Frank Merriwell; I am gone, and you'll never catch me. I ran

away because I would not let you be my boss. It won't do you a bit of good to try to find me.' Then I signed my name to it. And I slipped into his room and put it where he would find it first thing in the morning."

"Waste time," declared the Indian. "Might been catched."

"He was sound asleep in his bed. I could see his form under the clothes, but I could not hear him breathing. I got out just as quick as I could."

"Now we get away," said the Indian. "Get good start before morning."

He had a rifle in his hands, while his old blanket was folded and fastened on his shoulders, so that he was in marching-trim.

"I'm ready," said the boy. "I'll follow you, Joe."

"Come."

The Indian started, with the boy at his heels, but as they passed round the rock they were amazed to see standing before them a silent figure in the moonlight—a man, with his arms folded over his breast.

Dick gave a little cry, while Old Joe stopped, half-lifting his rifle.

"Good evening," said a pleasant voice. "Isn't it rather late for a moonlight stroll?"

Frank Merriwell stood there before them!

"Ugh!" grunted the astounded redskin.

The boy was amazed and bewildered, for he had felt certain that Merry was fast asleep in bed in the cabin.

"It's a lovely night, I know," said Merry, in his calm, self-possessed manner; "but a boy like Dick should be in bed. Where were you thinking of going?"

"It's none of your business!" cried the lad chokingly.

"I rather think it is," was the serene retort. "If you will not tell me, I shall be compelled to tell you. I know all about it. You were thinking of going away, Dick. You were going to run away from me."

"I am going to now!"

"I don't think so."

"I am! I will! You can't stop me!"

"I have stopped you already. You will go no farther."

"Boy go with me," said Old Joe, fingering his rifle. "Get out of way!"

"He will return to the cabin with me," asserted Frank confidently.

"No take him back!" declared Old Joe. "Get out way, or shoot um quick!"

"Don't try it," advised Merry. "I am his brother, and I know what is best for him."

"He different from you," said the redskin. "He like me better. He going to be like red man."

"Hardly!" exclaimed Frank dryly. "I have no time to waste words with you, Crowfoot; but I tell you now, for the first and last time, that I will not have you monkeying with my brother or trying to thwart me in my plans. If you——"

The old Indian was enraged, and he suddenly flung his rifle up to shoot Frank straight through the body, but, with a sharp cry, the boy made a leap and knocked the barrel of the weapon aside.

Just in time! The rifle spoke, and the bullet whistled close to Frank.

"Thank you, Dick," said Merriwell coolly, as he swiftly advanced. "That is the second time you have kept this old heathen from salting me, and I'll not forget it."

He stopped close to Old Joe, at whom he looked fearlessly.

"Crowfoot," he said, "you have twice attempted my life. If you try the trick again, I'll shoot you down like a dog! I don't want to do it, but I do not propose to have you make a target of me. I could have shot you just now. See here!"

Then Merry displayed a revolver which he had held clasped in his hand all the while, the weapon being

concealed under one arm as his hands were folded over his breast.

"I could shoot you now," Frank went on; "but I do not wish to do so. You have filled this boy's head with false notions, but I am going to drive those notions out of his head. You have taught him some things of value, but even you were not shrewd enough to discover me as I lay in the little hollow there and waited for this meeting. I was here ahead of you, and I concealed myself, as I was taught to do by one of your own race. In my bed I left a dummy figure, which deceived Dick, and——"

"How did you know anything about it?" panted the boy, in wonder. "Did Felicia tell you?"

"Not a word."

"Then how did you know?"

"Perhaps the birds told me," said Frank, in a mysterious way.

Dick started.

"The birds?" he said, thinking how he had called the feathered creatures of the woods about him just before he revealed his secret to Felicia.

Then a strange thought came to the lad. Had the birds listened as he told the little girl of his plans, and had Frank somehow obtained the knowledge from them? The fact that Merry had learned of those plans somehow, and had appeared to intercept the boy

in his flight, seemed singular indeed; but the possibility that he had obtained his knowledge in some marvelously mysterious manner from the birds was bewildering.

A feeling of awe came upon Dick. He was struck by the conviction that it was impossible to keep anything from his wonderful brother.

Old Joe was not so much impressed, although he was not a little chagrined over his failure to discover Frank waiting in the vicinity of the rock.

"Come, Dick," said Merry quietly; "we will go back to the cabin. To-morrow we'll talk over your plan to run away with Crowfoot, and, if you can convince me that it is for your good, I'll let you go with him. I am going to do just what is for your good."

This did not satisfy the boy by any means, but he was overawed and subdued by the powerful will of his brother, and he offered no further resistance.

Old Joe was disgusted and indignant.

"You go with him?" he asked of Dick.

The boy nodded.

"It's no use now, Joe," he said, with resignation. "He knows all about it. It wouldn't do me any good to run away now. I'm going back."

The old Indian grunted.

"Go!" he cried. "Old Joe, him go to the mountains."

Then, to the surprise of both the boy and the Indian, Merry turned to Old Joe, saying:

"Crowfoot, come back to the cabin. I want you to stay and teach Dick all that you can."

The Indian seemed incredulous.

"You fool Old Joe," he declared.

"I am not in the habit of fooling," Merry asserted. "I speak the truth; I want you to teach him as much as you can. I believe that no man acquires useless knowledge. It may seem that he does, but, some time during his life, he is certain to find need of it. It always has been my policy to keep my eyes and ears open and learn all that I could. I know something of Indian lore, for I am not quite the tenderfoot I look, and one of my friends was a young Indian by the name of John Swiftwing."

"Ugh!" grunted Crowfoot. "Him go to Injun school, marry half-blood squaw?"

"Yes."

"Old Joe know um."

"You know him?"

"Him live in mountains, not hundred mile from here."

"Crowfoot, are you telling me the truth?"

The Indian relapsed into indignant silence.

"You did not tell me the truth the first time I saw

you," said Frank. "Why should I not ask the question?"

"No know um then."

"And, now that you know me, you are ready to shoot me in a moment. Still, I want you to come back to the cabin. Dick need not fear that I am going to take him away to school right off. I have no thought of doing so now, and he'll not have to go until he is perfectly willing. If you, Crowfoot, know where Swiftwing is to be found, I want you to take me to him. I shall be glad to pay you in any possible way for your trouble."

The Indian stood still and looked at the boy. Frank also looked at Dick, who immediately said:

"I am going back to the cabin, Joe. Won't you come?"

But the old fellow seemed offended.

"No," he said; "not now."

Dick knew it was useless to try to persuade Old Joe, and so he did not make the attempt.

"Mebbe come in one, two day," said Crowfoot. "Mebbe not come at all."

Then, without even bidding Dick good-by, the strange old redskin turned and strode away, soon passing from the moonlight into the shadow of the deep woods, which hid him from view.

CHAPTER XIX.

READY ARRIVES.

Not a word did Frank say about Dick's attempt to run away, and, as they had returned to and entered the cabin quietly, Juan Delores knew nothing of it.

Of course, Felicia was amazed and overjoyed when, the following morning, she found Dick still there. Dick would say nothing save that he had decided not to go away for a while.

Old Joe was gone, but as the Indian had a habit of disappearing and appearing without warning, nothing was thought of this.

In spite of himself, deep down in his heart Dick Merriwell felt further respect for his brother. He was compelled to confess to himself that Frank was very clever, and he came to stand in some awe of him. Still, he persisted in his determination not to let Merry "boss" him.

"I'll always be free," he muttered over and over. "I'll never go into a school. He can't make me do that."

But he wondered greatly how Frank had discovered that he was going away at all. He did not know that

Merry had left the cabin by the back door, while Old Joe smoked by the wall, and strayed into the woods. He did not know that Merry had paused by the path and knelt to examine a wild flower he found growing there. And, while Frank was kneeling thus, Dick and Felicia came along the path. From the little portion of their talk that Merriwell heard as they bade each other good-by, he learned that Dick was going away with Old Joe, whom he would meet that night near Black Rock.

And thus it happened that Frank was on hand at that meeting.

Merry was satisfied that his strange, wild, young brother cared for him more than he wished any one to know, else he would not have made such frantic haste to disconcert Old Joe's aim. Had the Indian shot Merry down, Dick would have been free forever, yet the boy sprang at once to prevent that act.

Frank wished to win his brother to him without using force. It was his desire to bend Dick's strong will and passionate nature, but not to break either. The young athlete was convinced that there was in Dick the making of a remarkable lad, and he hoped to handle him in the proper manner to bring out his best qualities.

But first it was necessary to win the obstinate and wilful spirit to him, and that seemed like a difficult

tack indeed. However, Merry felt that he had scored heavily in preventing the runaway as he did. He had not resorted to force, but he had convinced Dick that he was in some things a match for Old Joe, whom the lad admired.

On the day after the attempted runaway, Bart Hodge and Jack Ready came riding up the valley. Business had called Ready to Denver, and Hodge had met him there. His business attended to, Jack was willing and eager to hasten to Frank in the quiet little valley under the shadow of the Rockies.

Frank was watching for them, and he sighted them through a field-glass as they came galloping up the valley.

Dick and Felicia were also watching, with strange, silent Juan Delores not far away.

"It's another of his friends," said Dick, in a low tone to Felicia. "I'm sure this one will show signs of his long days spent in study. He must be round-shouldered and weak."

As the two riders drew nearer they spurred on their horses and raced for the woods. It was a wild neck-and-neck dash, and, although Bart seemed to sit his horse a trifle better than Jack, the latter managed to be in at the finish.

"Hooray!" he whooped, waving his hat about his

head and flinging himself from the saddle. "The pardon has arrived in time! Your royal muchness, here we are, hide, hoof and horns. Behold us, adorned in all the glory of the wild Western cowboy. Are we not peaches?"

Then he grasped Frank's hand, gave it a furious shake, and bent to press his lips upon it.

"I salute ye, oh, mighty potentate, whatever that is," said Jack, in his familiar breezy manner. "I know you are overjoyed to gaze once more on my beautiful countenance, and I am very, very glad because you are so happy."

"He doesn't seem to be round-shouldered," whispered Felicia.

"Not—very—much," faltered Dick.

"And he doesn't look weak."

"Not—very—weak," admitted the boy.

"He doesn't wear glasses."

"He may have them in his pocket and put them on when he reads," said the lad, as if he really hoped so.

"And he can ride well."

"Pretty well," confessed Dick. "But he's just like the other one, in one thing; he acknowledged my brother as his superior."

"I didn't notice it."

"I did. It was in his manner."

"Why, I thought his manner very lofty and proud."

"But, just the same, there was something in it that confessed Frank Merriwell his master. I wonder if all my brother's friends are like that."

The boy's sharp eyes had read the truth, and his sensation was one of mingled regret and pride, for, despite himself, he could not help being proud that Frank was a leader of men.

"I'm glad to see you, Jack," said Merriwell, in his hearty way, that left no doubt as to his sincerity.

"I told you that you were," nodded Ready, with a haughty pose. "And I have traveled far to make you glad."

"Wish you had brought all the fellows along with you."

"Ha!" exclaimed Ready, with a wave of his hand. "Methinks I have a thought. Why not gather the clans together and once more swoop down on the wild and woolly? We wiped up everything on the turf last year; why not do a little wiping this year?"

"You mean——"

"Why not call the boys together, organize a base-ball-team, and indulge in the lively sport of killing umpires? What sayest thou? Is it not a radiant thought?"

"I have thought of it myself."

"What?" cried Jack, in dismay. "Wouldst even

rob me of the only original thought I ever possessed? Alas!"

"He is very queer," said Felicia to Dick.

"Very!" said Dick, frowning. "I saw a crazy man once that acted like him."

Which Jack would not have regarded as very complimentary had he heard it.

Merry introduced Ready to Juan Delores, and then said:

"Ready, this is my little cousin Felicia, and this is my brother Dick."

"Queen Felicia, I salute you," said Jack, bowing low, his hat in his left hand and his right hand pressed over his heart. "Before I came, you must have been the sweetest thing in all this wild region. Of course I can't help being sweet myself, for I was born that way, and you must not blame me if all the flies flock my way."

Then he turned and looked at Dick.

"So you are Frank Merriwell's brother!" he exclaimed. "Well, my boy, I want to tell you that there are a few million chaps like you who would just about give their blooming lives to be able to honestly call Frank Merriwell brother. They'd rather have him for a brother than to have the President of the United States for a father. You are a dead lucky chap, and that's straight goods."

The lips of the boy were pressed together for a moment, and then he retorted:

"Well, sir, I wish it was some one of those few million boys who want him for a brother who had him instead of me!"

"What's this?" cried Jack, aghast. "Treason! Who ever heard of such a thing? Boy, you're crazy!"

But Dick stood up defiantly, his proud lips curling with scorn.

"A regular heart-blow!" muttered Ready weakly. "Is this a sample of the brothers you pick up, Merry? Oh, my, my! And you the idol of Yale!"

Frank laughed.

"I enjoy it, Ready," he said, and his manner seemed to indicate that he told the truth. "I don't think I ever had anything satisfy me more than has this rebellious disposition of my high-spirited young brother here."

This made Dick tremble with anger.

"I'm not doing it to please you!" he cried. "I won't please you!"

But Merry simply smiled.

"You can't help it, Dick," he asserted. "In disliking me so ardently you have provided me with a new sensation. I assure you that it has given me pleasure to watch and study you."

"I won't be watched and studied!" cried the lad. "I'll keep away from you! Oh, how I hate you!"

Then he turned and fled from the spot.

Dick felt humiliated and ashamed, for it seemed that Frank had laughed at him before his friends. Ridicule to a boy of his passionate disposition was a dreadful thing, which cut deeper than the keenest blade.

Jack Ready regarded the whole affair as a joke, and he sought to banter Merry about his peppery young brother.

"A regular untamed young colt," he observed. "Never saw anything just like him. He's a bird, Merriwell. I'm afraid you'll have hard work breaking him to the saddle."

Hodge had brought some baseballs, two bats, and a catcher's mitt from Denver, and the following day the three young men got out in a clear place in the valley and began to practise.

Felicia saw them first, and she ran to Dick with an account of what they were doing.

"Why, they throw the ball at each other just as hard as they can," she said, "and they catch it in their hands, just as easy. It's fun to watch them. Come and see them, Dick."

"No," said Dick.

"And they have got a stick that they hit it with," she went on. "One of them takes the ball, gives it

a little toss, then strikes it with the stick and knocks it so high in the air that you can hardly see it."

"I'll bet they don't catch it then," said Dick.

"But they do," asserted the girl. "Then others run and get under it, and catch it with their bare hands."

"It must be soft," said the boy.

His curiosity was aroused, and, after a time, he permitted Felicia to lure him down to the open valley, where they could watch Frank, Bart, and Jack practising.

In short order Dick became intensely interested, and it was not long before be ventured out where the trio were, Felicia following now.

Indeed, it seemed rather surprising that the ball could be batted so far into the air and caught with such ease, even though the one who caught it sometimes had to run with all his might to get under it when it came down.

"Could you do that, Dick?" asked Felicia.

"Of course I could!" he answered, for he did not wish her to think there was any such accomplishment possessed by these tenderfoots that he did not also have.

Now, it happened that Jack Ready heard the question and the answer.

"What, ho!" he cried. "Here is another player for

our ball-team. Stand forth, Richard, and show your skill."

"No," said Dick, shaking his head.

"Ah, ha!" exclaimed Jack. "Methinks thou art fearful as to the result. In other words, you're putting up a bluff."

This was too much, so Dick walked out to catch the ball. Jack himself seized the bat, observing:

"I'll place the sphere in your fingers, Richard, my son. Let us see if you can freeze to it."

Then he knocked a comparatively easy one. Dick got under it, but, when the ball struck his hands, it immediately bounced out and dropped to the ground.

And it hurt his hands in a most surprising manner, for he found it almost as hard as a stone.

Dick did not betray that he was hurt.

"You must squeeze it, young man," chirped Ready. "That is one of the first things to learn. When a ball strikes in your hands, close your fingers on it and squeeze it hard."

Angry and disgusted, Dick caught up the ball and threw it straight at Ready with all his strength.

Now, the boy could throw a round stone with remarkable accuracy, as well as great speed, and he had used all his strength in this case. Imagine his surprise when Ready carelessly thrust out one hand

and caught the whizzing ball as if the feat was the simplest thing in the world.

Dick looked at Frank. If Merriwell had laughed then, it is possible the boy would have stopped in a perfect tempest of anger; but Frank stood aside, looking quite grave and interested.

"I will catch it!" thought the lad. "I'll show him that I can catch it!"

Then he cried for Jack to hit out another one.

"Well, that's the stuff from which heroes and ball-players are made," said Ready, as he complied.

This time Jack did not bat the ball directly into Dick's hands, and the latter was forced to run after it a little. Again he got his hands on it, and this time he managed to catch it.

"Good!" cried Frank approvingly. "That was well done!"

To the amazement of Dick himself, he thrilled with satisfaction on hearing those words of praise from Frank. But he would not try to catch any more then.

"That's right," laughed Ready. "You have a level head, for you know when to retire on your laurels. I wish I knew as much. I would have retired long ago."

Then Bart Hodge put on the big mitt, while Ready stood up to strike the ball. A flat stone was the plate,

and from it Frank paced off the regular pitching-distance.

Then, with great speed, Frank pitched the ball. Ready fanned, and Bart caught it, close under the bat.

Dick Merriwell caught his breath, and watched with still greater interest.

"Fooled me that time," said Jack. "Put 'em over now, and I'll drive out a three-bagger."

"What is a three-bagger, Dick?" asked Felicia, who had found his side again.

"I don't know," he was forced to admit.

"You did catch the ball, didn't you?" she said proudly.

"Yes," was all he answered.

"But it wasn't near so high as they knocked it before."

Dick shrugged his shoulders, declaring:

"If I had some practise, I could catch it just as high as anybody."

"But it must be dangerous. You won't do it, will you, Dick?"

Now, danger was the very thing that served as a lure to lead the boy on, and he retorted:

"Oh, I'm going to try it some more. I like it."

Frank sent in another swift one, and again Jack failed to hit it, though he struck at it handsomely.

"The double-shoot!" he shouted. "Oh, Laura! but

that was a peach! It twisted both ways as quick as a flash."

"What is he talking about?" muttered Dick. "I didn't see it twist."

He moved around to get another position, and chance happened to lead him behind Bart, at some distance.

Then, when Frank pitched again, Dick saw the ball come whistling straight ahead, and suddenly dart off to one side, while Ready missed it a third time.

"Nothing but an out!" said Jack, in disgust. "And I thought it was going to be another double."

"No wonder he can't hit it," thought Dick. "Why, the ball didn't go straight! I wonder what made it go off to one side like that."

The next one, however, amazed him more than anything else he had seen, for it seemed to start curving one way, and then suddenly change and curve the other.

"Another double-shoot!" exploded Ready, in disgust. "Say, stop it, will you! You're the only pitcher in the country who can throw the ball, so I don't care to practise batting against it. Give me just the plain, ordinary curves."

"All right," laughed Frank. "I was trying it simply to see if I had good control and command of it. Next one will be of the ordinary kind."

It was an in shoot, but Jack hit it a good crack, and joyously cried:

"Safe hit! Oh, me! oh, my! Wasn't that clever of me?"

"You'd never got a hit like that off him in a game, and you know it," said Hodge, while Merry was after the ball. "He's the greatest pitcher who ever came out of a college in this country."

"Admitted, my boy," nodded Jack. "And he has a reputation from the Atlantic to the Pacific. He's a wonder, and everybody knows it."

Again Dick Merriwell felt a strange thrill of satisfaction and pride, and to himself he unconsciously whispered:

"He's my brother!"

CHAPTER XX.

WINNING HIS WAY.

What he had seen and heard that day wrought a change in Dick Merriwell. Although he had never witnessed a game of baseball, he began to feel an intense longing to see one. He pictured it in his mind, and the picture was far from correct, but it served to add to his growing desire.

He heard Frank say that he had written to several of his friends, and the trio of young athletes began to discuss the possibility of getting enough of the old crowd together to form a ball-team. They spoke of the excitement of the games and the sport they could have, and Dick Merriwell's interest increased steadily as he listened.

"I'd give anything to see one of those games!" he told himself.

When the three went out to practise Dick accompanied them, and, after that first day, he did not hesitate to try to catch the batted balls. To him it seemed that these efforts were rather discouraging, for he often muffed or misjudged them; but he did not know that both Ready and Hodge had told Merry that the way in which he handled himself and clung to the ball

was astonishing for a chap of his years who had never seen a ball before.

Inwardly Frank was well pleased about the interest Dick was taking, but he did not betray his feelings, nor did he praise the boy. Instead of praising, he sometimes criticized. However, he did not permit his criticism to savor of ridicule.

Merry well knew that some natures can be much better spurred on by criticism than by praise, and it is often the case that praise seems positively harmful to a growing boy or a developing youth. He had seen many good ball-players spoiled by praise, while few had been harmed, to his knowledge, by criticism.

Occasionally a lad may be able to stand praise, which may serve to spur him on; and, once in a while, severe criticism is absolutely harmful. Once in a while a boy may be ridiculed into doing his best, but always ridicule is a last resort, for it generally does more harm than good.

Frank knew that a proud and sensitive lad like Dick could not stand ridicule, although what seemed like honest criticism would arouse his nature and lead him to persistent effort. So Merry avoided any show of ridicule when he spoke freely of Dick's failings.

Ready would have praised the lad openly, but Merriwell took care to warn Jack against doing so. Hodge did not need such a warning, as he was not in the

habit of praising anybody, with the single exception of Frank.

Merry's critical words cut Dick deeply, seeming to arouse a tempest of anger within him.

"He thinks I'm not as smart as the boys who go to schools!" the indignant lad told Felicia one day.

"What makes you think that?" she asked.

"Oh, I know—I can tell! He doesn't think me very smart. He doesn't think I could ever play ball if I tried, but I'd like to show him!"

Now this was the very feeling that Frank had sought to awaken in his spirited brother, for he knew it would serve to spur the boy on.

Sometimes Frank, Bart, and Jack talked of old times and the excitement of the baseball-games in which they had participated, and then, if he fancied himself unobserved, Dick would linger near and listen, though he pretended to take no interest whatever in what they were saying.

More and more the desire grew within him to witness a regular ball-game. He was a boy who loved excitement, and he pictured the dashing, desperate struggle of two baseball-nines, with the cheering spectators to urge them on.

One day Frank left the valley, with Dick for a companion, and rode to Urmiston. They were mounted on

two spirited horses, and the lad took delight in giving Merry a hard race to the little town, but found that the "tenderfoot" was pretty nearly a perfect horseman.

At Urmiston, Merriwell received two letters which seemed to give him considerable satisfaction, but, after reading them, he thrust them both into his pocket, saying nothing at that time of their contents. On the way back to Pleasant Valley, however, Merry suddenly observed:

"Well, Dick, I am going away soon."

"Are you?" said the boy. "That is good!"

"I thought you would be glad of it. A number of my friends are coming from the East, and we are going to organize a baseball-team. We'll play such clubs as we can get games with, and so pass the summer."

Dick said nothing.

"We'll have lots of sport this summer," Merry went on. "It's too bad you can't see some of the games. But, then, I don't suppose you care anything about them?"

The heart of the boy gave a strange throb. Then Frank had decided to go away and leave him behind!

"Why won't I see any of them?" he asked. "You are going to make me go with you, aren't you?"

"No," was the quiet answer.

"But—you—said——" Then Dick choked and

stopped, his mixed emotions getting the mastery of him.

"I might have taken you with us if I had not found that you were so set against it," Frank said. "But I have come to the conclusion that it will be better to leave you behind. Then I shall not be bothered with you."

The face of the lad flushed with angry indignation, and his dark eyes flashed.

"Oh, that is it!" he cried scornfully. "You pretended at first that you were so greatly interested in me that you were ready to do anything for me, but now I know that it was all pretense, and that you simply wanted to make me uncomfortable. Father said that you were to take care of me and see that I received proper training, but, just as soon as you think I may be a little bother to you, you are ready to drop me. That shows what kind of a brother you are! I'm glad I've found out! I wouldn't go with you now if you wanted me to! You couldn't make me go with you!"

"It's true," said Frank quietly, "that father wanted me to take care of you, but it may be that he did not know the kind of a task he was imposing on me. If you were the right kind of a boy, I'd do everything in my power to your advantage, no matter how much trouble it cost me; but it is evident that you prefer to

run wild and come up in any old way. You choose your ignorance in preference to all the advantages I could give you. I fear I could not make much of a man of you, anyhow, so why should I try?"

The lad trembled from his head to his feet with the intensity of his rage. Then, all at once, he savagely cried:

"You can't throw me over that way! I won't let you! You're getting tired of me, but I'll make you do just what father said you were to do! You shall not go away and leave me here! I'll go with you! I will! I will! I will!"

"Don't get so excited about it," advised Frank. "That's where you show a weak spot. If you ever become a successful man in this world, you must learn to govern your temper. You let yourself——"

But Dick refused to listen longer, and, fiercely cutting his horse with his quirt, he went dashing madly toward the distant valley, Frank following behind.

There was a satisfied smile on Merriwell's face, for he felt that he was winning in his struggle with the obstinate spirit of the boy. But he took care not to let Dick see that smile.

When they arrived at the cabin home of Juan Delores, Old Joe Crowfoot was there, sitting with his back against the wall, grimly smoking his pipe.

He did not even look up as they approached.

CHAPTER XXI.

FROM THE JAWS OF DEATH.

The following day, guided by Old Joe, a party set out on a journey to the mountains, in a secluded valley of which, the old Indian declared, John Swiftwing lived with his half-blood wife. The party was made up of Frank, Bart, Jack, Dick, and the old redskin.

They did not start till past midday, and it was their plan to camp out for at least one night. All were well mounted and armed and prepared for roughing it.

Dick had dressed himself in the half-Mexican finery he was wearing the first time Frank saw him. Those were the clothes in which Juan Delores delighted to see the lad attired.

Dick bade Felicia an affectionate adieu, promising to return within two days. At first she had feared he was going away for good, and the thought had nearly broken her heart; but she was relieved when Frank gave her his word that they would return.

That night they camped by a stream that came down from the mountains and flowed out through a broad valley, in which a great herd of cattle was grazing.

Old Joe had discovered "antelope sign" some hours before, and he set out to shoot one of the creatures.

But Merriwell took a fancy to see what he could do, and, by skirting a ridge that kept him from view of the antelopes, he reached a point where he could obtain a good shot at them when they were alarmed by the Indian and took to flight.

Thus it happened, much to Dick's amazement, that Frank brought in the antelope, while Old Joe returned empty-handed.

This seemed something like a marvel to the lad, but, if possible, Old Joe was even more astonished, and, although he tried to conceal it, he felt deeply chagrined over the outcome of the affair.

Joe, however, insisted on cooking the juicy steak cut from the slain antelope, and, though he felt that he could do it quite as well himself, Merry did not refuse the old fellow this privilege.

The smoke of their camp-fire rose in a blue column. Behind them rose the cottonwoods by the stream, and the majestic mountains towered close at hand. Soon the coffee-pot was simmering on some coals raked out from the fire, sending forth a delightful odor that gave every one a feeling of ravenous hunger.

Wrapped in his old red blanket, Crowfoot squatted by the fire and broiled the antelope steak, smoking his pipe.

No one observed that Dick had slipped away. They were talking of college days, and the conversation

served to make them forgetful of their romantic surroundings.

"Alas!" sighed Ready, "old Yale will not seem like it used to be, now that Merry has taken himself hence, his radiant brow wreathed in undying laurels."

"I'm glad I'm through," asserted Bart. "I couldn't stay there another year."

"It'll be hard on me," confessed Jack. "But I'll have to stand it. There is one satisfaction in the thought that there will be no one in Yale to dispute my claim to the honor of being the most beautiful and highly intellectual chap on the campus. But the football-games—oh, my! And the baseball-games—oh, me! What will they be without Merry? Oh, Lud! I shall think with breaking heart of the days gone by, when the only and original Frank Merriwell reigned. I shall listen in vain for the acclaiming populace to thunder forth his name. Nevermore! ah, nevermore!"

Then, as Jack pretended to weep, there came a sudden and startling interruption. There was a clatter of hoofs, a shout, and a cry of warning.

They started and turned. Bearing down upon them was a wild-eyed steer, and, astride the back of the animal, they saw Dick Merriwell!

"Look out! Jump!" cried Frank, as, with lowered head, the frightened steer charged straight for the fire.

"Make way for the gentleman!" cried Ready, scrambling aside in ludicrous haste.

Bart Hodge got out of the way without a word.

And right through the smoke, leaping over the fire, went the steer, while a wild peal of laughter came from the lips of the daredevil boy astride the back of the creature.

"Oh, ha! ha! ha! ha!" shouted the lad. "Ha! ha! ha! Ha! ha! ha!"

"Talk about your untamed catamounts!" gurgled Ready. "Why, that boy is the worst yet!"

"Ugh!" grunted Old Joe. "Him got Injun heart."

But Frank said not a word, as he leaped to his feet and ran toward the spot where his horse was picketed.

Merry knew Dick was in danger, for the wild steer might run at that mad pace for miles and miles, and there was no telling what might happen when the lad got off the creature's back.

Merry's horse snorted as he came up, backing away and flinging up its head; but he seized the picket-rope and quickly had the beast by the head.

Up came the picket, and Frank quickly flung himself on the back of the horse, without stopping to saddle his mount. Then he whirled the horse's head toward the spot where he could see the steer careering

down the valley, and gave the bronco the end of the rope.

He was off in pursuit, wondering how it happened that Dick had managed to get astride the steer.

The explanation was simple enough. Dick had wandered away to the stream, where he climbed into the lower branches of a tree. The steer came along to drink, and the reckless youngster dropped astride his back.

Merriwell urged the horse to its fastest pace, guiding it with the picket-rope. He did not look back to see if any of the others followed, but kept his eyes on the steer that was bearing the boy away.

The herd of cattle at a distance looked up in alarm as the frightened steer approached. Merry feared they might stampede, with the steer ridden by the boy at their head.

As the animal approached the rest of the cattle, it suddenly swerved to one side and made a half-circle. Then it partly stopped, and, seizing the opportunity, Dick slipped from its back to the ground.

Frank lashed his horse still harder, for he knew that Dick was now in the greatest peril of all. The cattle of the plains are used to the sight of mounted men, whom they respect and fear; but the spectacle of a human being on foot attracts them, first arousing their curiosity and then their rage. Woe to the hap-

less man who is thus discovered by a herd of cattle, for, unless he can quickly find shelter of some sort, he is almost certain to be charged upon, gored, and trampled.

Knowing this, Merry raced to the rescue of his brother, his heart in his throat.

The steer ran a short distance, and then turned and looked at the boy, pawing the ground. The cattle began to approach, gathering in on the lad.

"Keep still!" muttered Frank, as he again lashed his horse. "Face them, Dick—face them!"

The boy did face them at first, but they gathered thicker and thicker. One after another they began to bellow and paw the ground. Their eyes glared, and their aspect was awesome indeed.

The boy turned and moved away, upon which the herd started after him. He looked back over his shoulder and saw them coming. The bright colors in his clothes aided in arousing them. Then Dick saw Frank racing toward him, and he turned in that direction.

"Keep still!" shouted Merry. "Don't run! don't run!"

But the only word Dick understood was:

"Run!"

Immediately he started running toward the approaching horseman.

In a moment the great herd was moving after him, faster, faster, faster. There rose a rumble of hoofs that was terrifying, a clatter of horns like musketry, and behind the mass of cattle floated upward a dust-cloud that resembled the smoke of battle.

Frank Merriwell urged his horse to its utmost, bending forward and seeking to estimate the possibility of reaching the boy in time.

Dick ran for his life, well knowing that certain death was seeking to overtake him.

Nearer, nearer, nearer! Then Frank shouted:

"Stand still! Make ready!"

It seemed that the rushing herd must sweep them both down, but Frank charged athwart the crest of the mass of animals.

Fortunately the boy heard and understood this time. He stopped and partly lifted his arms, but, knowing that to pick him up while dashing at full speed on horseback was a feat worthy of a most experienced and expert cowboy, there was doubt and fear in his heart.

Frank leaned over, clinging to the neck of the horse. It seemed that he meant to run the boy down, he went so close to Dick. As he passed, he made a clutch at the strong sash of the lad—caught it—held fast!

The boy was lifted by Frank's powerful arm. He felt himself raised and flung across the horse in front

of his brother, and then the doubly burdened horse wheeled and swept away from beneath the very noses of the cattle.

The herd did not follow far. The cattle seemed surprised at the sudden disappearance of their intended victim, and they quickly settled down and stopped.

When they were safely away, Frank lifted Dick, holding an arm about him. The lad looked at Merry's face and saw it was very pale, but strong, and resolute, and masterful.

"That was a close call, Dick," said Frank quietly. "I was afraid once that I'd not get there in time."

Not a word of reproach or reproof. In that moment the heart of Dick Merriwell went out to his brother in a great leap of affection.

"Frank," he said, his voice not quite steady, "I—I want to stay with you—always."

"You shall, Dick!" promised Frank.

CHAPTER XXII.

CHALLENGED.

"For the love of goodness!"

"What's the matter?"

"Look at this!"

Bart Hodge did not often get excited and express his feelings by ejaculations, but now he was the first speaker. Merriwell was the one who asked the question, and Bart thrust the paper he had been reading toward Frank as he said, "Look at this."

"Where?" asked Merry.

"There!" said Bart, pointing his index-finger at the article that had excited his astonishment. "Just read that, will you!"

The matter under observation was headed, "Baseball Challenge," and read as follows:

"It is reported that Frank Merriwell, late captain of the Yale baseball and football-team, is in the vicinity of Denver, having brought with him a picked ball-team, with which he proposes to wipe up the earth with anything and everything he can find west of the Mississippi. Such being the case, as manager of the Denver Reds, the champion independent baseball-team of the State of Colorado, I challenge Merriwell's team to a

game of ball, to be played in Denver any time within ten days, for a purse and the entire gate-receipts.

"I am confident that my team can show the collegians a few points in our great national game, and I believe that as a pitcher Merriwell has been greatly overrated. Everybody with sense knows that the story that he can throw a ball that will curve both in and out before reaching the batter is perfectly ridiculous, and, in case he has sufficient courage to accept this challenge, the Reds have the utmost confidence that they can bat him out of the box before the end of the third inning.

"It is admitted that last season he did manage an independent team that won a number of victories, defeating a Denver club, but I contend that the majority of the nines playing against him were made up of the rankest amateurs, and that not one team in the list was in the same class with the Reds. Not knowing Mr. Merriwell's present address, I take this means of placing my challenge before him, but I sadly fear that he will not have sufficient courage to accept.

"DAVID MORLEY, Mgr. Denver Reds."

They were sitting in the lobby of the Metropole Hotel in the city of Denver, where they had met Browning, Rattleton, Gamp, and Carker that day by appointment.

The expedition that had set out to find Swiftwing had not been successful. They had found only his deserted shanty. The Indian and his wife were gone.

When he had finished reading the challenge, Frank laughed quietly, but, on looking up, saw Hodge was scowling blackly.

"That's a case of unbounded confidence, isn't it, Bart?"

"Unbounded insolence, I call it!" growled Hodge. "Why, that challenge is almost an insult—it is an insult!"

"It's pretty plain language," Frank admitted.

"Plain! It's rank! Why, the fellow says you haven't courage enough to accept!"

"Well, it is an easy matter to convince him that he has made a mistake."

"But he sneers at your pitching."

"Possibly I may be able to take some of his sneering out of him in a game, if I happen to be in form."

"I know you can, Merriwell, but the crust of it is what galls me. He says you have been overrated."

"Probably he thinks so."

"Well, he's got another think coming to him."

"This is exactly what we are looking for, Hodge. We have pulled ourselves together to play ball, and we——"

"We haven't had any practise."

"Morley gives us enough time for that. We can play him any time within ten days."

"Besides, we are two men short, and I don't see

how we are going to fill out the nine. Stubbs can't come, and Mason's mother died at just the time to prevent him from joining us, and here we are. It's out that you have a ball-team, and this duffer flings us a challenge."

Bart's warm blood had been stirred by the offensive challenge in the Denver paper, and he was not in a pleasant mood.

"If we had found Swiftwing——" Merry began.

"But we didn't," Hodge cut in.

"I'd give a little to know where he has gone."

"Old Joe said he would find him. And that's the last we have heard of Old Joe. I don't believe we'll ever see anything of that old vagrant again."

"Somehow I have a fancy that Old Joe will turn up with news of Swiftwing."

"What if he does? He may not turn up in time to do any good, and you can't remain idle and wait for something that may happen. You must accept that challenge, Frank."

"I intend to," came quietly from Merry's lips.

"Without the two men needed?"

"I'll have to pick up men somehow. Now, there's Berlin Carson——"

"Speaking of me, Merriwell?"

Both Frank and Bart started and turned as the words fell on their ears. Toward them advanced a

prepossessing youth, who had observed them sitting there as he was passing through the lobby.

"Carson, as I live!" exclaimed Frank, in deep satisfaction, as he quickly rose and extended his hand.

With a long, quick stride, the newcomer approached and grasped the proffered hand, his blue eyes beaming with pleasure.

"Merriwell, I am overjoyed!" he declared. "I heard you were somewhere in Colorado, but I had not the least idea of running across you here. It's lucky the governor sent me into town on business at this time."

"Lucky for us," nodded Frank, as Carson and Hodge shook hands. "You are the eighth man for our ball-team, if we can get you to come in with us."

The eyes of the Colorado lad showed his satisfaction.

"You can count on me for anything, Merriwell," he asserted. "The governor is sure to let me join you, for he thinks you are just about the proper thing, and he has thought so ever since he first met you. He knows I'd never made the varsity nine if it hadn't been for you, and that makes him think all the more of you. You may count on me. Where are your other men?"

"They're out looking the city over."

"Who are they?"

Frank told him.

"All good men but Carker," said Carson; "and he can put up a good game when he gets right down to it."

"But we're still a man short," said Hodge. "Merriwell has a brother, a perfect little wonder; but he's too young—only thirteen."

"A brother?" exclaimed Carson, who knew nothing of recent developments in connection with Frank.

Then Merriwell briefly outlined the whole strange story, having a very interested listener.

"He's a wonder," Hodge again declared, referring to Dick Merriwell; "but he has never seen a regular game of ball in his life. He had some balls, mitts, and a bat out there in Pleasant Valley, where he has always lived, and you should have seen him get after the ball. Why, that boy has more sand than any fellow I ever saw, and he is made up of determination. He just sets his teeth and catches anything that is tossed up to him. Merry has begun to teach him to pitch."

"Yes," laughed Frank, "and he is furious because he can't get onto the trick of throwing the double-shoot. He swears he'll do it if he lives long enough."

"That's the true Merriwell stuff," nodded Carson. "I've never seen him, but I'll bet my life he'll make a bird."

"But it's useless to think of playing him," said Mer-

riwell. "Besides being too young, he knows next to nothing about the game. I'm going to take him round with me this summer and give him all the education in the ball-playing line that I can."

"Well, we'll have to find a man," said Berlin. "I know some players, and I'll——"

Just then something happened that caused the trio to wheel about instantly.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DICK MERRIWELL'S NERVE.

"Take your dog away, sir! Take him away, or I'll shoot him!"

A clear, boyish voice rang through the lobby of the hotel.

"Black" Ben Elrich, one of the best known sporting men and gamblers of the State, had just passed along the corridor, accompanied by two companions of his ilk and a huge, fierce-looking mastiff.

Dick Merriwell, running lightly into the corridor, had been stopped by the dog, which suddenly whirled on him and drove him back several steps, seeming on the point of leaping at the lad's throat.

For some unknown reason the dog seemed to have taken a sudden dislike to the boy, and, as he growled and showed his teeth, he looked dangerous, indeed.

Immediately on being driven back by the dog, Dick had drawn a revolver, which he held ready for use. Elrich uttered an exclamation of astonishment and anger.

"Stop Rex, Dan!" he exclaimed. "Get hold of him, Tom! He'll chew up the kid!"

"He won't do that," returned the boy instantly, "for

I shall shoot him in his tracks if you don't take care of him."

The men accompanying Elrich leaped forward, one on either side of the dog, and grasped the huge animal by the collar. Barely had they seized him thus when the animal tried to make a spring at the throat of the boy, and it took their combined strength to hold him in check. "It's a good thing for him that you grabbed him just when you did," exclaimed the cool youngster. "I knew he was going to jump, and I'd sure shot him."

"Why, confound you, kid!" growled Elrich, as the men pulled the dog back; "how dare you pull a revolver on my dog?"

"I'd pull a gun on your dog just as quick as I would on you," returned Dick. "I don't consider your dog much better than you, sir, though it's right likely he is some."

"That is my brother!" said Frank Merriwell to Berlin Carson.

"Well, he's a hummer!" exclaimed the rancher's son, in deep admiration.

"Let's sift in and take part in that," breathed Hodge eagerly.

"Wait," advised Frank. "I want to see what that black-whiskered fellow will try to do, and I also wish to see how Dick handles himself."

The big sporting man was angered by the words of the ready-tongued youngster, and he growled:

"You're an insolent brat, and you need to be taught a lesson!"

"I scarcely think it would be to my advantage to have you for an instructor," returned the lad. "Anything I'd learn of you would be an injury to me."

Now, "Black" Elrich had killed his man, and was generally respected and feared by the dangerous element of the town, and it was a novel experience for him to have anybody fearlessly face him and talk to him in such a manner.

"I'd begin by wringing your neck!" he asserted. "It's just what you deserve!"

"And I'd shoot you so full of holes that you'd make a first-class sieve, which would be just what you deserve," retorted Dick Merriwell, his cheeks burning.

"If you were a man——"

"Don't let that bother you, mister. I can take care of myself. Keep your hands out of sight, or I may think you're reaching for a shooting-iron, in which case I shall not hesitate to break your elbow with a bullet."

"Why, you don't know how to handle such a toy as that!"

"Don't I? Perhaps not, but I've had a few lessons

from a man who is your master with any kind of a weapon."

"Meaning you?" asked Carson of Merriwell.

"Meaning an old Indian by the name of Joe Crowfoot," explained Frank, in a low tone. "Crowfoot taught him to shoot rifle, revolver, and bow and arrow, and he's a credit to his tutor."

"Well, you're a mere kid, and you have no right to carry concealed weapons," said Elrich.

"And you're a mere ruffian, who has less right to carry concealed weapons," flung back Dick. "I know you've got a gun on your hip, and I shall ask to have you searched if you make complaint against me."

"That's the stuff!" muttered Carson. "He's sized up Black Elrich in a minute, and he's bluffing the most dangerous man in Denver."

The eyes of Bart Hodge glowed with satisfaction. Bart had never spoken a word of praise to Dick, but there was about the boy much that awakened his admiration.

"Where's your father?" demanded the gambler, furiously. "I'll call on him and see if he——"

"You'll never call on him," Dick declared, "for you're not going in his direction. He's up there."

The boy pointed upward, and Black Ben thought he meant that his father was above in the hotel.

"What's his name?" demanded the man. "I'll go up to him at once."

"Spare yourself the trouble, for it's higher than you'll ever get. He is dead."

For a moment the man was taken aback, and then his fiery temper flamed up.

"You're some runaway brat who thinks——"

"Stop!" exclaimed the lad. "That is the second time you have called me a brat, and I warn you not to do so again! I am not a brat, and I——"

At this point one of the men who had pulled the dog away stepped in by a side door and clutched the wrist of the boy, giving it a wrench and twisting the revolver away with his other hand.

It was done in a twinkling, and Black Elrich sprang forward. At the same moment Merriwell advanced, with his two companions at his heels.

But, before one of them could interfere, out through the same door strode a tall form that caught the man who had clutched Dick, grasped him by the neck, gave him a swing and a throw that flung him fifteen feet away, sprawling on the tiled floor of the corridor.

Behind this tall figure came another, about the shoulders of which was a dirty red blanket, perchance the most remarkable figure ever seen in the Hotel Metropole.

Both were Indians, but the first, almost six feet tall

and straight as an arrow, was dressed in the garments of civilization. The other, however, must have attracted attention anywhere in Denver from his half-savage attire. The first was young and handsome; the second was old and wrinkled.

"Joe!" cried the boy, as he saw the old Indian.

"Ugh!" said Old Joe Crowfoot.

With a furious exclamation, Black Elrich started to whip out a revolver; but his wrist was clutched from behind by fingers that seemed like bands of steel, and he was held fast, while a quiet voice spoke in his ear:

"I wouldn't try that trick, sir! You have been monkeying with my brother, and I shall have to call you to account if he is molested further."

Elrich was trembling with the intensity of his rage.

"Let go!" he panted, as he looked round.

A pair of calm brown eyes looked into his with utter fearlessness, and Frank Merriwell spoke again:

"I shall not let go until you realize the folly of trying to do any shooting here. Two friends are with me, besides the two who have just interfered to protect my brother, and we can do some shooting when it is necessary."

Elrich became cool at once.

"I see that you have the advantage, sir," he said; "and I will not be foolish enough to draw. I give

you the word of Ben Elrich, and my word is good, whatever else may be said about me."

Instantly Frank released the wrist of the man.

"I accept your word of honor," he said.

"But let me tell you," said the baffled gambler, "that I'll not forget what has happened here. You say that boy is your brother? Well, you had better take care of him."

"I have an idea that, given a fair show, he can take care of himself. He proved quite able to do so until one of your friends caught him at a disadvantage by a trick. It took two men to get the best of a boy of thirteen, which is something I feel certain you will not be proud of."

"Who are you?" demanded Elrich. "I may wish to see you again."

"My name is Frank Merriwell, and you will find me right here at this hotel, for a day or two, at least."

"Frank Merriwell!" muttered Black Ben, starting a trifle, and looking at Merry with added interest. "And this is your brother?"

"Exactly."

Then the gambler turned and looked at Dick, as if fixing the features of the boy upon his memory, so that he would know the lad again, anywhere and under any circumstances.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MERRY'S CHUMS.

When the chagrined and defeated Elrich, together with his worthy companion, had departed from the corridor, Frank Merriwell lost no time in offering his hand to the handsome young Indian who had intervened in time to save Dick from further molestation.

"Swiftwing!" Merry exclaimed, in deep satisfaction. "I am glad to see you."

The face of the Indian remained grave, but deep in his eyes shone a light that told his unspeakable emotions.

"Frank Merriwell," he said, in a deep, well-modulated voice, "once I thought never to look on your face again, but fate has permitted us to meet once more."

Frank thought of the farewell message written him by the Carlisle Indian almost a year before, in which Swiftwing had expressed the affection and admiration that his tongue had never spoken. Their hand lingered in contact, and then Hodge offered to shake.

Bart had never liked Swiftwing much, but now he was truly glad to see the young Indian.

Old Joe Crowfoot stood there like a mummy, his keen black eyes watching all that took place.

"It's a great piece of luck," said Merry. "You are the man to fill out our baseball-team."

"It is not luck," said Swiftwing. "Crowfoot came to me and told me you had been searching for me."

"Then I have Crowfoot to thank?"

"Old Joe, him tell you he bring Swiftwing," said the old fellow quietly.

"And you have kept your promise."

"Not for you," Old Joe asserted. "For Dick."

"Dick, he——"

"He make Old Joe promise."

"But I thought——"

"You thought I did not care," said the boy. "And yet you had snatched me from beneath the hoofs of a herd of cattle."

"Which was no more than a fair return for the times that you kept Old Joe from letting daylight through me."

"Joe thought he would be doing me a favor; that was why he tried to shoot you twice."

"Merriwell," said Carson, "it strikes me that you have your baseball-team."

"Right!" exclaimed Hodge. "Now we'll take some of the conceit out of the Denver Reds."

"I have not played the game since I left you last

year," said Swiftwing. "I shall be entirely out of practise."

"We have time to get into practise some," Merry explained. "We'll try to do so without delay. Where is the White Dove, Swiftwing?"

"She became tired of our life, far from the friends she had known," explained the young Indian. "It is not strange, for she has the blood of the white man in her veins. I saw she was getting restless and unhappy. At first she would not tell me why, but I discovered her secret. Then I sent her back to Badger's ranch, where she shall stay till she wants to come to me again."

"And you," said Frank, smiling a little, "despite your resolve to become a hermit and mingle no more with men, I rather fancy you fell to longing for the excitement of the diamond and the tumult of the gridiron. Is it not true, John?"

"Sometimes I think of it," the young Indian confessed. "It is like nothing else, and once a man has played the games and loved them, he may never quite forget."

"That's the truth," nodded Carson.

They took the elevator and went up to Merry's room, Frank insisting that Crowfoot should come along. Old Joe would not have accompanied them, however, had not Dick urged him to do so.

"Smoke?" questioned the wrinkled Indian, as soon as he was inside Merriwell's handsomely furnished suite, which was one of the best in the hotel.

"As much as you like," nodded Merry, flinging wide open a window.

The old savage gravely squatted on the floor, bringing forth his long black pipe and filling it with tobacco. When he had lighted it he sat there, puffing away in silence, while the others talked.

Of course, there was much to talk about, and the conversation was moving briskly when Ready and Rattleton drifted in. Jack struck a pose when his eyes fell on Swiftwing.

"What is this I behold?" he cried dramatically. "Is it my noble friend of the war-path? Whoop! It is! It are! It am! Come to me arms, my noble ghost-dancer, and let me fold you, like a long-lost brother, in a fond embrace."

Then he pranced forward and clasped the hand which Swiftwing gravely submitted. The young Indian was accustomed to the exuberant ways of Ready, and took no offense.

"And here is that gentle young gazelle, Joseph Crowfoot, Esquire," said Ready, making a grand bow. "Chief, I salute you."

"Ugh!" grunted Old Joe, as he continued smoking, without paying any further attention to Jack.

Then Ready saw Carson, rubbed his eyes, looked again, pinched himself, and exclaimed:

"Ho! ha! Also he! he! Likewise ho! ho! This is another jolly little surprise. Here is me old side-partner, the cow-puncher! Pard, this is a sight for lame eyes! You dear old maverick, how is your general health?"

"It's first-class, Ready," laughed Berlin, as he shook hands with Jack. "I don't think it ever was better."

"Isn't that perfectly lovely!" gurgled Ready. "You have happened along just in time to get into the round-up. In the words of the poet, 'What, oh, what, is so jolly as the sight of a bosom friend whom you can touch for a beautiful green bank-note?' I may want to borrow a dollar or ten to-morrow, Carson."

"When did you gind this fang—I mean, find this gang?" asked Rattleton of Frank.

"Swiftwing, Crowfoot, and Carson happened along," Merry explained. "It's dead lucky for us, as we have been challenged by the Denver Reds to play ball, and we were two men short."

Rattleton had met Swiftwing, and he shook hands with the young Indian, while Ready was chattering away to Carson. Then he grasped the hand of the young college man.

Soon the door opened to admit Gamp, Browning, and Carker, who, of course, were equally surprised.

"Gug-gug-gashfry!" laughed the New Hampshire youth. "This is just like old tut-tut-times!"

"Trouble! trouble!" murmured Browning wearily. "I scent baseball in the air, and that means my finish. I'll melt and run into a grease-spot during this hot weather."

"Baseball, at best," said Carker, "is a rather cruel sport in many ways. It is the triumph of the weak over the strong, which is a sad thing to contemplate under any circumstances."

"Hush!" said Merriwell, lifting his hand. "Be still, everybody!"

They obeyed, and, after a moment, Rattleton asked:

"What is it?"

"I fancied I heard the rumble of Carker's pet earthquake," answered Merry gravely.

Greg flushed, then exclaimed:

"That's all right, Merry; but the time is coming when you will hear and feel something more than a distant rumbling and a faint tremor. The time is coming when——"

"Will—you—let—up!" shouted Greg's college friends, in unison, and the ardent young Socialist relapsed into despairing silence.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE NINE AT PRACTISE.

The following morning the principal Denver newspaper contained the following:

"FRANK MERRIWELL ACCEPTS.

"MR. EDITOR.

"DEAR SIR: While reading your paper yesterday I was somewhat surprised to see the challenge of Mr. David Morley, manager of the Denver Reds. While it is true that I have a number of my friends with me at the present time and have contemplated playing ball, it is not true that I have taken special pains to pick a nine, or that I have publicly expressed an intention of 'wiping up the earth with everything I can find west of the Mississippi.' It seems to me that Mr. Morley's challenge is couched in language that is not only offensive, but is likewise insulting. My ball-team has not played together this season, and therefore is not in its best form. Nevertheless, I am willing to meet the Reds, and we will do our best to make the game interesting. As we are out for sport and not to make money, I decline to play the game for a special purse; but I am willing to make an agreement that the winning team shall take the entire gate-receipts.

"Yours truly, FRANK MERRIWELL.

"Hotel Metropole."

As it was necessary for Merry's team to get some practise without delay, Frank secured the privilege of using the principal ball-field of the city that afternoon.

In the forenoon the entire team appeared at a tailor's, and the men were measured for suits.

At two o'clock in the afternoon the boys appeared on the field in order to get some practise, having bought bats, balls, gloves, mitts, and other necessary articles.

It is needless to say that Dick Merriwell went along. Old Joe Crowfoot, however, had disappeared the previous night, and had not been seen since.

It was not thought that they would be troubled with spectators, as pains had been taken not to let it become known that they thought of practising at that time.

Dick took a seat on the bleachers, where he intended to remain and watch the practise.

Frank put his men onto the field, with Swiftwing in left, Gamp center, and Carker right. Of course, Browning, apparently too weary to move, was detailed to cover first bag. In the old days Rattleton had made a very satisfactory man on second, and Merry placed him there again, while Ready was planted near third. Carson was a good infield man at any point, and Merry made him short-stop.

Then Bart and Frank started in to give the men some work by batting out to them, Merry having the infield and Bart batting to the outfield.

This was the simplest form of practise, but it was good work to start with, and soon the men were hard at it, although they could not do as well as they might had they been in regular uniforms.

"Don't be afraid of getting the crease out of your trousers, Rattles, old man," called Ready. "Tailors are hard-working and industrious people, and they must have business. Besides, we've got to hump ourselves if we shave any frozen liquid in that little game with the redoubtable Reds. Yea, verily!"

They went into it in earnest, although it quickly became apparent that practise was sadly needed. Frank gave them all kinds of balls to handle, hot grounders, skippers, slow bunts, high flies, little pops, and liners.

"Ready!" he called, and out to Jack he drove a slasher along the third-base line, making the fielder by that bag jump and stretch for it.

Jack cuffed it with one hand, stopped it, fumbled it, got it up, and lined it across to first. But the throw was bad.

"That stop was all right," said Frank, "and you would have had time to get the man after your fum-

ble if you'd made a good throw. Lots of games are lost by bad infield throwing. Try it again."

By that time the ball had been thrown in to him, and he again sent it skimming the ground toward third.

Ready set his teeth, got squarely in front of it by a hard dive, stopped it, but did not pick it up cleanly, fumbled a little, and then made a beautiful line throw across to first.

With one foot on the bag, Browning lazily smothered the ball in his big mitt.

"That was better," commented Frank, "but it wasn't perfect. Try another."

And again he drove a "daisy-clipper" toward Jack, though not directly at him. This time Ready scooped up the ball, turned like a flash, and made a fine throw to first.

"That's the stuff!" declared Frank approvingly. "Now you are doing it handsomely."

He kept the others at it in the same manner, never letting up on a man till he did his work right. He had studied the temperament of each individual man, and some he praised, while others he criticized, though both praise and criticism were of the kind to be most effective without harming the player.

Rattleton had not been playing ball for some time, and two failures to pick up hard grounders seemed to

take the confidence out of him, for he muttered, loud enough for Carson to hear:

"I'm afraid my ball-playing is about over. I'm not in it any more. I feel like ficking myself over the kence—I mean, kicking myself over the fence."

He had not intended that Frank should hear, but Merry's keen ears caught the words. Immediately Frank divined that Rattleton had lost confidence, and he decided at once that it must be restored. Then he batted a comparatively easy one straight at the second-baseman, who managed to get it and send it to first.

"Why, you can't help doing it right when you get into gear, Rattleton!" laughed Merriwell. "It's just as natural for you as it is to talk backwards."

Harry knew the ball had been easy to get, but these words seemed to indicate that Frank had confidence in him, and that served to restore his own confidence. In a few minutes he was working much better, and he soon went after the balls as if he felt sure of getting them.

"It isn't necessary to take a double step to throw, Carson," said Frank. "That's a new trick with you. You don't throw that way naturally. When you get a ball up clean, use the short-arm throw in sending it over to first, with a step just as the arm swings forward, putting the weight of your body into the throw.

That gets the ball away from you without loss of time."

Carson's face was red, but he nodded, saying, good-naturedly:

"I'll try it, if I can remember."

"Of course you can remember in practise," said Frank, "and what you get in the habit of doing in practise is what you'll do in a game. That's what hurts lots of men. They fool around in practise, and it harms them when they come into a game. In practising, every man must handle himself just as he would in a game, if he wishes for the best results."

When Browning betrayed a disinclination to "stretch" for balls that were thrown wide, Frank immediately opened on him sharply. He did not do so in a jollying way, knowing jollying would not awaken the big fellow to his best, but spoke in earnest.

"I'd lick any other man for that," muttered Bruce to himself; "but, as long as it's Merriwell, I guess I'll have to ginger up."

And he did.

All this served to awaken Dick Merriwell to a realizing sense of Frank's supreme authority over men, and he glowed with pride in his big brother.

Frank was giving close attention to the work of the infield, and so he did not observe much that was

taking place in the outfield. After a while, however, Bart came close and said, in a low tone:

"It's no use, Merriwell; the Indian has lost his cunning. He hasn't made more than one decent catch thus far, and he'll be just about as good as a ten-year-old kid in that field."

Merry was somewhat surprised by Bart's words, for Swiftwing had been a good man in days gone by. True, he was a better pitcher than outfielder, but he had demonstrated more than once that he could do good work in the field. Immediately Frank said:

"Change round. I'll bat to the outfield a while."

He drove the first ball out to Carker. It was an easy fly, and Greg gathered it in without trouble.

Then Frank gave Gamp one that made the long-legged New Hampshire youth cover ground to the best of his ability; but Gamp was in form, and he pulled the ball down after his long run.

It was Swiftwing's turn. Merry put up an easy one, but he refrained from driving it directly at the Indian, knowing many fielders will miss a ball when nervous if they have to stand still and wait for it, although they will catch it when they have to make a brisk move to get under it.

Swiftwing got under the ball, but he did not hold it.

"You couldn't drop another one if you tried to," cried Frank, in a manner and tone that indicated his

firm belief in his own words. Then he proceeded to drive another out to the young Indian.

Swiftwing got under it, but again the ball bounced out of his hands. This time, however, he made a leap for it, and caught it before it fell to the ground.

"That's what I told you!" laughed Frank. "I knew you couldn't drop the ball, old man. It's no use for any old ball to try to get away from you."

He made Swiftwing believe it, and from that time on the Indian steadily improved, so that, before long, he was catching everything any one could reasonably expect him to hold. Hodge was astonished.

"How the dickens do you do it?" he asked. "You have a way of making a man do his best."

Frank smiled.

"Few men do their best unless encouraged," he said; "but all men cannot be encouraged in the same way."

The main secret of Merriwell's success in handling men was that he brought out the very best that was in them. Had Bart paused to think about this he would have known it was true, for Frank had developed in Hodge all the best qualities of the latter.

Frank directed Bart to fling aside his bat and put on his big catching-mitt. Then Merry batted to both infield and outfield, directing the throwing of each man. The throwing-practise was sharp and fairly

good. Hodge overthrew second the first time he sent the ball down, but after that he sent the ball straight as a rifle-bullet.

"Runner on first and second!" called Frank. "Double play!"

He drove the ball to short, and Carson picked it up, snapped it to third, upon which Ready drove it to second in beautiful style.

"Sure double," said Merriwell. "Runner on first, one man out, two strikes on the batter. Double 'em up."

Down between first and second bounded the ball. Rattleton went out for it, his teeth set, and took it successfully. Then he wheeled and jerked it back to second. Carson had covered second when he saw Rattleton start after the ball, and he took the throw. The ball did not linger in his hands, but went whistling to first, where Browning smothered it.

"No mistake about that," asserted Frank. "The swiftest runner in the country could not have made first on that."

It was amazing how those fellows improved in a short time under Merriwell's direction. Frank called them in, one at a time, to get batting-practise, Hodge putting on cage and body-protector.

"Come out here, Dick," said Frank. "I want you to throw some, while I coach the batters."

This call had been unexpected by the boy, and he hesitated for a moment.

"That's right," said Browning, who was the first batter; "give us something easy."

Immediately Dick left the bleachers and entered the diamond, his eyes flashing and his lips pressed together.

"Don't strike him out, Dick," adjured Merry, as he tossed the ball to the lad. "He'd feel bad if you did."

"No danger," grunted Browning. "The outfielders better move back."

Frank went up behind the catcher, announcing that he would act as umpire and coach.

Dick Merriwell had tossed aside his jacket as he entered the diamond. His shoulders and arms were fairly good for a boy of his age, although they might have been developed more.

"Give your signals," called the boy to Bart.

Frank had been teaching him to pitch by catcher's signals.

"Oh, you won't need to bother about that," said Browning.

The words of the big fellow seemed to put the boy on his mettle. Hodge called for an out, and Dick delivered it quickly. Browning was not looking for a curve, and he swung at it.

He did not touch it.

"One strike!" laughed Frank. "At least, he fooled you once."

"Why, the young rascal has a curve!" exclaimed Bruce, in surprise. "I thought he had never seen a game."

"He never has."

"Oh, say——"

"It's a fact, but he has been practising some."

"Oh, well, one curve is pretty good for a boy like him; but he'll never fool me with it again."

Bart called for an in, and the boy nodded.

Then Dick swung out with all the speed he could command, which was excellent for a lad of his age. The ball seemed coming straight over, and Bruce fancied it must be a straight one this time. He slashed at it hard, but the ball took a sharp in shoot, and he fanned again.

"Is it possible!" laughed Frank. "Now, wouldn't it be awful if it really did happen that—— But I won't speak of it."

"Confound him!" growled the big Yale graduate. "He has two curves! You must have found him an apt pupil, Merriwell."

"Not at first; but he is coming into it all right."

"I should guess yes! But I fancy his stock of

tricks is exhausted now. I'll just have to line it out."

Hodge signaled for another in, but Dick shook his head. He also shook his head on being given a signal for an out, but nodded when Bart called for a drop.

Then the boy threw a ball that seemed a very pretty one to Bruce, but it suddenly dropped toward the ground, just when the big fellow swung the bat, and he missed it for the third time.

"Struck him out, Dick!" said Frank, smiling. "I knew you could do it."

"Struck me out, by thunder!" rumbled Bruce, his face crimson. "Struck out by a kid like that!"

He seemed to be greatly cut up over it, but Merry was highly satisfied.

"He struck you out, for one reason, because you were too confident, Browning," said Frank. "You thought you were dead sure to hit a little chap like that. It is this same overconfidence that sometimes makes a good batter strike out. A heady pitcher often gives a good batter the impression that it is easy to get hits off him, doing it for the very purpose of fooling the batter. There are lots of tricks in pitching besides throwing curves. Change of speed is necessary. Then a pitcher may often fool a batter by appearing to have no control over the ball. The

batter thinks he is sure of getting a base on balls, and he waits, throwing away his chances."

Then Merry directed Dick to give Bruce some good straight ones, instructing the big fellow to swing to meet the ball, and not to "kill it."

"It's the first duty of every batter to get his eye on the ball," said Frank. "If he stands up and slashes away with all his strength, he seldom succeeds in this. Slashing is what spoils many good men who might become skilful batters."

Browning had a reputation as a "home-run hitter," and no home-run hitter is ever a sure hitter. It's the man who meets the ball cleverly and places it for singles who is the most valuable. Of course, there are times when home-run hitting counts, and it always enthuses the spectators; but the man who tries for nothing save long hits does not obtain the best results.

Coached by Frank, Browning met the ball handsomely several times, and then was sent out to his base, Ready being called in.

"I suppose I'm the only real thing that never fans," chirped the apple-cheeked fellow.

Frank looked at Dick and nodded. Bart gave his signals, and Jack began to fan at once, missing the first two.

"Oh, Laura!" he exclaimed. "How did it happen?" But I always do that to fool the pitcher. Then I put the next one over the fence."

The next one, however, was a high in shoot, and he was completely deceived, as Browning had been.

"Look here, Richard, my son," said Ready; "you're altogether too flip! Is this the way you treat your trusting friends?"

The boy showed his teeth in a smile that was very attractive, illuminating his entire face. That face was a most expressive one, betraying his suddenly shifting emotions.

"I'll have to teach him to work the batter with his looks," said Frank. "There is something in it. A pitcher who looks intensely savage sometimes impresses the batter as dangerous. The pitcher who wears a cool, disdainful smile is liable to provoke the batter so that he cannot locate the ball. There are all sorts of tricks in this business."

Then Frank began coaching Jack about his striking, causing him to stand up and step straight out toward the pitcher with one foot when he swung at the ball, instead of swinging the foot back and partly behind him, which is a very bad fault, as it weakens the batter's position and spoils his ability to drive out sure hits.

When a shrewd pitcher finds a man is given to

stepping back or pulling away from the plate, he is pretty sure to "keep 'em in close," which will drive the batter back right along.

One after another the members of the team came in and took their turn at bat, and Merriwell's instructions were obeyed implicitly. All were surprised by the skill displayed by Dick, and it was the universal opinion that the boy had the making of a pitcher in him.

Indeed, Dick had accomplished much in the short time he had been at it; but he was the brother of Frank Merriwell, and the same sort of perseverance and determination dwelt in his breast.

When Frank was satisfied that Dick had thrown enough, he took the lad out and went into the box himself.

At this point, before Merry had delivered a ball, several persons entered the grounds by the gate. One seemed to be an old man with gray whiskers, while two of the others were Black Elrich and the man who had first caught the big dog by the collar in the Hotel Metropole.

Elrich was at the head of the party, and he advanced straight toward the diamond. As he drew near, he loudly said:

"So this is your team, Merriwell? I'm glad I

found you here. I've brought Dave Morley, manager of the Reds, along. This is Mr. Morley."

A short, stout, thick-set man came forward. He had a smooth-shaven face of the bulldog cast, and he was smoking a black cigar. His first words were:

"Mr. Merriwell, I see you are a squealer."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A DESPERATE ATTEMPT.

The man's manner was quite as offensive as his words, but Merry looked at him calmly, betraying no emotion, as he asked:

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Your acceptance of my challenge was a squeal," declared Morley.

"How?"

"My challenge was to play for a purse and the entire gate-money."

"And I accepted, stating my reasons for declining to play for a purse."

"Which was a squeal."

"Which was nothing of the sort! I have not started out with the intention of running this ball-team to make money. We are out for sport, and nothing else. I am not a gambler, and I take no satisfaction in playing ball for purses."

"Oh, I don't suppose you ever did such a thing in your life?" sneered Morley.

Merry flushed.

"It makes no difference what I have done."

"But you can't deny that you have played for purses."

"Never without protest—never unless practically forced to do so. In this case, I refuse to be forced. The gate-money should be sufficient to pay well the winning team."

"My team is run under heavy expense, and there is no assurance that your aggregation of amateurs will prove a drawing card."

Hodge was at Frank's elbow, scowling like a thundercloud, his heart filled with hot anger over the insolent words of the man. Bart's fighting blood was being stirred, and he longed to give Mr. David Morley just what he deserved.

"Then you have the privilege of declining to meet us," said Frank. "That will settle the whole matter in short order."

"He knows we'll draw!" exclaimed Hodge. "Your name alone, Merriwell, will turn out a crowd."

"I think you are mistaken," said the manager of the Reds. "In the East, Frank Merriwell may be regarded as something of a wonder, but out here he does not count. We have plenty of better men."

"I'll bet you——" began Bart hotly.

"Ah!" grunted Morley; "at least this member of your team is not adverse to making a little gamble, Mr. Merriwell."

"That has nothing to do with him," said Bart. "I'll bet you ten dollars we get more hits off your pitcher than you do off Merriwell."

"Ten dollars!" came scornfully from the manager of the Denver team. "Why don't you make it ten cents? You're putting the figures too high, young man."

His words and manner were calculated to enrage Bart still more. Frank's fingers fell with a firm grip on the arm of his friend, and he quietly said:

"I do not think we'll do any betting over the game. If you wish to play us on the terms stated by me in my acceptance of your challenge, well and good. If you do not, we'll let the matter drop."

"It's plain enough, Morley," put in Elrich, "that the young chap knows which side his bread is buttered on."

"He must think me a mark to put my salaried team against his collection of non-salaried kids," sneered the baseball man, "unless there is something more than glory in it. It's mighty little glory we'd get defeating his team."

"That's right!" exclaimed Bart; "for you'd never defeat it."

"Then we'll have to call the game off," said Frank, remaining perfectly calm.

"That's a shame!" muttered Berlin Carson, who

had heard some of the talk. "I'm a Colorado man, but I think I know what Merriwell's team can do, and——"

"We cuc-cuc-can do those fellows," said Gamp, who also was aroused.

"Why, it would be a snap!" chuckled Jack Ready. "All we wanted the game for was to get a little practise."

"You're a lot of bluffers!" roughly declared Morley.

"I told you there was nothing in it, Dave," said Elrich, with an air of weariness. "The boys have not money enough to put up a purse."

Then Frank felt some one tugging at his elbow, and he looked round to see Dick there, his eyes gleaming and his face flushed with indignation.

"Bet him, Frank!" palpitated the lad. "I wouldn't stand it to have him talk that way to me! You know father was dreadfully rich, and all his money was left to us. I'll bet every cent of my part that your team can beat his!"

"Ho! ho!" laughed Morley. "And how much might your part be, kid?"

"Oh, a little trifle of eight or ten million dollars, that's all," said Frank, who could not help being somewhat nettled by the insulting manner of the man. "I think it would be quite enough to accommodate you,

in case it was staked against anything you could raise at twenty to one."

It was not often Merriwell said anything like this, but just now he had been provoked to the limit, and he could not refrain.

"You don't mean to say the kid is worth eight or ten million dollars, do you?" asked Elrich, as if incredulous.

"He will inherit something like that amount when he comes of age," answered Merry, as he carelessly toyed with the ball he had held throughout this conversation.

A swift look passed between Elrich and the man with the gray whiskers, who stood slightly apart from the group.

"And you're his brother?" Elrich questioned further.

"I am," bowed Merry.

"Where do you come in?"

"What do you mean?"

"What part of this snug little fortune do you get?"

"Really, sir, I do not know as that is of any concern to you. Still, it is no secret that I, also, will inherit a similar sum when he comes of age."

"When he does? That's odd. You're of age now. How does it happen that——"

"I decline to speak of this matter further, sir, as I——"

"You're a big bluffer, Merriwell. I do not take any stock in your romance of millions."

"And I care not a snap whether you do or not."

"If you had so much money at your command, you'd not hesitate to put up a few hundred to back your ball-team—that is, if you really believe your team capable of playing ball."

"I have reasons for not gambling in any way," said Frank. "I do not expect men like you to respect my scruples, so all this talk is wasted."

"Well, we can't fool with you!" angrily sneered Morley. "I'll bet you five hundred dollars, even money, that the Denver Reds can defeat your ball-team. If you will not cover the money, we'll fool away no more time."

"If he will not cover your money, I reckon I will!" exclaimed a voice, as a man, who had approached without attracting notice, pushed into the excited group.

"Father!" exclaimed Berlin Carson.

"Mr. Carson?" came from Merry's lips.

"That's me!" nodded the rancher, extending his hand and giving Merry a hearty grip. "Forgot to tell Berlin to attend to one little piece of business while in the city, so I decided to follow him. Heard over

at the hotel that you were here, Merriwell, with a ball-team. They told me where to find you, and I came right out. What sort of a game of talk was this man giving you?"

"He was trying to force me into wagering money with him over a ball-game to which he has challenged me. He is the manager of the Denver Reds."

"Well, I don't often bet against a home team, but I know you, and I've seen your men play ball, so, if he wants to plank down five hundred, I judge I can accommodate the gentleman. I believe I have that amount of money about my clothes."

"Then you're the man I'm looking for!" exclaimed Morley. "Mr. Elrich is my backer, and he will put up the money."

"Who'll hold the stakes?"

"Why, Mr. Jordan here is a good man to——"

"I allow I don't know anything about Mr. Jordan, but I do know Charley Gans, down at the Metropole, and he'll suit me to a T."

"Gans is all right," nodded Elrich, who seemed eager to get the bet.

"Then I'll meet you there at six this evening, and we'll put up the dust," said Mr. Carson, with a dismissing wave of his hand. "Good day till later."

"Hurrah!" cried Dick, flinging his hat into the air. "That's the stuff!"

"Slang, my boy—slang!" said Ready, severely. "You're catching on altogether too quick. I'm afraid you have been associating with bad company lately."

"You're a regular young sport!" said Elrich, with apparent admiration, his words being intended to flatter the boy.

"Are you a sport?" asked Dick.

"Well, I allow I have some sporting blood in me."

"Then I'm no sport!" the lad quickly asserted. "I don't want to be like you."

Elrich's smile turned to a frown, but he said:

"You're pretty sharp with your tongue, but you may have some of your flipness taken out of you some day. All the same, I like you, and I'll give you a drive back to the hotel in my private carriage, if you'll go."

"Hardly," said Merry. "He can have all the drives he likes at his own expense."

"Oh, very well!" said the gambler, turning away and starting to talk in a low tone to Morley.

Mr. Carson was speaking with those of Frank's friends whom he had met before. Now he turned to Merry once more.

"I reckon I've got you to thank for getting my boy onto the Yale ball-team," he said. "Berlin said it was through you he got a chance to show what he could do."

"It was because I knew he had the right stuff in him," asserted Merriwell. "I presume you'll let him play with us against the Denvers?"

"Sure as you're shouting! And I'll disown him if he doesn't put up a good game."

At this moment there came a sudden cry. They turned to see Dick Merriwell, caught up by the man with the gray beard, being carried swiftly toward the gate, which was standing open. The man was running, holding the struggling lad under his arm.

For an instant every one seemed paralyzed with astonishment. Then Frank Merriwell sprang out, his arm went back, and, with all his strength, he threw the ball in his hand.

Straight as a bullet from a rifle flew the ball, and it struck the running man fairly on the back of the head, knocking him forward on his face.

This caused him to drop the boy, and, quick as thought, Dick scrambled up and leaped, like a young panther, on the back of the man.

When Merriwell leaped forward, Black Elrich suddenly stepped into his way, and there was a collision. Elrich staggered and caught hold of Merriwell's arm, to which he tried to cling.

Instantly Frank beat off the hand of the man, sprang round him, and dashed to the aid of Dick.

But the man had flung the boy off, and now he rose to his feet, casting one quick look over his shoulder.

A surprising thing had happened, for the man was beardless now, his gray whiskers being grasped in the fingers of the plucky lad. Frank saw the face of the man.

"Mescal!" he cried.

It was Mescal and again he had made a desperate play to get possession of Dick Merriwell, for Frank was confident it had been the intention of the fellow to abduct the boy.

Mescal now fled like a deer out through the gate, sprang into the carriage standing there, tore the reins from the hands of the driver, snatched out the whip, cut the horses, and was carried away just as Frank came up.

For a moment Merry contemplated pursuing the desperado, but he quickly decided that it would be folly to make the attempt.

Black Elrich came rushing out through the gate, shouting:

"Stop! stop there! By heavens! he's running off with my team!"

Frank faced the gambler, his eyes flashing.

"The job failed, Elrich," he said cuttingly. "It was a daring attempt, and rather foolish, I think."

"The man is crazy!" said Black Ben.

"Crazy to make a play for ransom-money," said Merry. "I know him, and I'll see that the police of Denver are put on his track. If he is caught, he may squeal and expose his pals. In that case, Mr. Elrich, you are liable to feel rather uncomfortable."

"Do you mean to insinuate——"

"My words are plain. I saw the look that passed between you and that man a short time ago. My eyes are pretty wide open."

"Why, I don't know the man. He came along to the gate as we were entering, and walked in with us."

"By appointment?"

"Nothing of the sort! I tell you I don't know him. And anybody who knows me will swear that my word is good."

"In a matter of cards or other gambling it may be. But I wish you to inform Anton Mescal that I shall be better prepared for him next time. The ball that brings him down then will be of lead, and not a common baseball."

CHAPTER XXVII.

A DASTARDLY TRICK.

Frank went directly from the ball-grounds to police headquarters, where he told of the attempted abduction of Dick, giving a full description of Anton Mescal, and entering complaint against the man. The police fancied Mescal was an old offender under another name, and promised to do their best to lay hands on him.

When Merry reached the Hotel Metropole he found that something had happened. Mr. Carson had again encountered Black Elrich, who had expressed a doubt concerning his sincerity in the assertion that he would back Merry's ball-team. As a result, Carson had deposited the money at once, and Elrich had covered it, with the understanding that the game was to take place within two days.

"Two days!" exclaimed Frank, as the cattleman reached this point in his report of what had taken place.

"Yes," nodded Carson. "He said he would not object if you wished to play to-morrow, but would prefer that the game take place on the day following."

"And you put the money up under such conditions?"

"I did."

"The first trick!"

"What do you mean?"

"He knows my team has not played together yet this summer, and has not obtained much practise. He wished to get the game before we could put ourselves in the best condition."

"Why, he led me to believe that you wished to play to-morrow, but that he wanted another day for advertising-purposes."

"Which was his way of working the trick. Never mind, Mr. Carson; we'll meet him."

"And we'll beat him," put in Hodge.

"In that case, he will lose a good round sum of money," said the cattleman.

"Five hundred does not seem much to a man like him," said Bart.

"But five hundred is far from being all he will lose. It's the smallest part."

"How is that?" asked Frank.

"Why, another gambler happened to be present, and he seemed to know something about you. When I had covered Elrich's money, this other man asked me if I was dead sure that the fellow who was going to pitch against the Reds was Frank Merriwell, of Yale. I told him I was. He wanted to know how I

was sure. I explained that my son attended Yale, and would play with Merriwell's team. Then what do you suppose happened?"

"Go on," urged Merry.

"This man turned on Elrich and offered to bet all sorts of money on you, Merriwell. He said he would bet a thousand dollars even that you struck out no less than eighteen men. Elrich took him, and the money went up. Then he offered another thousand dollars even that the Reds would not get more than five hits off you. Elrich took that."

"Whew!" whistled Frank, while Bart Hodge simply said:

"He'll win."

"When the second bet had been covered, the man offered to put up one thousand against two thousand that the Reds did not score at all."

"And the offer was taken?"

"Yes."

Bart actually laughed.

"Whoever he is, that man knows you, Merry."

"Then," said Mr. Carson, "he offered a bet of two thousand to one that the Reds would be beaten, and that wager was taken."

"Five thousand dollars each!" exclaimed Frank. "That is big money on a ball-game."

"Who was the man?" asked Hodge. "Didn't you find out, Mr. Carson?"

"Of course, I was curious to know, and it seemed that he was no stranger to Elrich. They had met before, and Elrich called him Lake."

"Lake?" said Frank. "I do not think I have a friend by that name."

"I asked Charley Gans, the stakeholder, about him," said the cattleman, "and he said the man was a race-track gambler, and that his full name was Justin Lake."

"Justin Lake?" cried both Frank and Bart.

"That was his name," nodded Mr. Carson.

"Well, that beats anything," came from Hodge. "To think he'd bet on you, Frank!"

Merry laughed.

"Perhaps he did it to recoup, for he has lost enough in his time betting against me."

"Then you know him?" questioned Mr. Carson.

"I should say so. I have had two very serious encounters with the fellow, who is just as much a rascal as Black Elrich. Last year he plotted against Yale and bet money on her defeat, but I baffled his plots. Again this year he tried the trick, carrying me out to sea on his steam-yacht, where he originally meant to leave me in an open boat, so that I would not be on

hand at the New London boat-race. But once more I defated him, and he lost a large amount of money."

"Well, he's betting on you this time, and he finally had Elrich at a stand, for he proposed several other wagers, which the man would not accept. He also asked me if Hodge was to catch in the game. I told him so, and, finding he could get no more bets, he politely called Elrich a mark. He declared that, with Hodge catching, there was no possible show for any team outside the big leagues to defeat you. Some reference was made to your ball called the double-shoot. Elrich sneered and laughed at it. Lake said you could throw the double-shoot, but that there was no other catcher, save Hodge, who could hold it well."

"Compliment from a rascal!" said Bart. "No thanks for it."

"I hate to help Justin Lake to make a winning," said Frank; "but it can't be helped now. There is no way out of it."

"But I'll agree to take something out of his hide in case I meet him," Hodge declared. "I've been wanting to get my hands on him for some time."

Lake, however, was not found around the hotel.

The story of the great betting on the ball-game that was to take place within two days spread swiftly through the city, so that it became the talk in sporting circles.

Frank was very sorry that anything of the sort had happened, but still his conscience was clear, as he had rigidly refused to be driven into wagering money with a man like Elrich. When the other members of Frank's team heard about it, they all expressed satisfaction.

"Why, it's the greatest ad we could have had!" laughed Jack Ready. "I'll wager my loveliest pair of drop-stitch hose that we draw the biggest crowd ever seen at a ball-game in this city. And how I will surprise the populace. La! la!"

"Jiminy!" gurgled Gamp. "Th-th-th-things are beginning to git lively right off!"

"Money! money!" sighed Carker, shaking his head dolefully. "It is the root of all evil! It stirs up contention and strife! It arouses greed and envy! Ah, will the day ever come when all men shall be equally rich and equally poor?"

"Lot on your knife—I mean not on your life!" exclaimed Rattleton promptly.

That evening Hodge and Ready were walking along one of the principal streets of the city when an old woman stopped them at a corner, croaking:

"Young gentlemen, I can tell your past and future. I am Gipsy Mag, the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter. Let me read your palms, and all the mysteries of your lives shall be revealed to you."

"Tell me, pretty maiden, are there any more at home like you?" warbled Ready.

"I have no home," she answered. "My home is the whole world. For a quarter I will reveal to you many things."

"That's cheap enough," nodded Jack. "Here is your fourth part of an honest American dollar. Now, go ahead and tell me lots of lovely things."

The old woman's eyes were fastened on Bart.

"Let me tell his fortune first," she urged.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Hodge. "I do not care for it."

"It's a mash, old man," chuckled Ready. "You've hit her hard, my boy. If you don't submit to her demands, I'll tell the gang about your mash. Put up your fin and let the fair lady read your palm. Come on."

He playfully grasped Bart's wrist and held up his hand for the old fortune-teller to examine.

Not wishing to appear grouty, Hodge submitted.

The old woman firmly grasped the back of Bart's hand, over which she bent, mumbling something. Then of a sudden she poured from a small vial something upon Hodge's hand that immediately began to smart and burn like fire.

Bart gave an exclamation of surprise and anger,

snatching his hand away. The old woman flung aside the vial.

"It's the oil of success!" she cried. "Hereafter you will succeed in everything you undertake."

"It's a trick!" exclaimed Hodge hoarsely. "The stuff burns."

"That will stop in a moment," laughed the gipsy. "It will do you good."

"Grab her, Jack!" exclaimed Bart. "She has done something to put my hand out of commission."

But the old woman turned and ran with surprising speed through a doorway and disappeared into a saloon. Ready jumped after her, but, as he entered the saloon by one door, he saw her disappear through another that led onto a side street. He rushed after her, but she had vanished when he reached the street.

"Well, by the powers!" gasped Jack. "She's vanished like a witch!"

When he returned to the point where he had left Bart, he saw the latter just disappearing into a drug store. Jack hurried after. As he entered, he heard Hodge saying to the druggist:

"An old woman threw something on my hand that burns like fire. I believe it was acid. Give me something quick to relieve me."

The druggist sprang to obey, after taking a single look at Bart's hand.

"Vitriol, or something like it," declared the druggist, as he quickly applied to the hand something to soothe it. "But it's queer she threw it on your hand. Vitriol-throwers usually aim at the face."

Bart saw Jack at his side.

"Did you catch her?" he eagerly asked, although it was plain from the expression of his face that he was in pain.

"She got away," confessed Ready humbly. "Hodge, I'm to blame for this! I'm a chump—a blundering chump!"

"If it hadn't been for you——" began Bart, but he suddenly checked himself, controlling the impulse to reproach his companion for what had happened.

"I know—I know!" muttered Ready. "Oh, I'd like to kick myself! But who ever thought that old hag was up to anything of the kind?"

"Why did she do it?" asked the druggist, as he continued to apply the lotion to Bart's hand.

"That's a mystery," said Ready.

"No mystery at all," said Hodge, at once. "It was so that I may be unable to catch in the game against the Reds. That was the trick. With a raw hand like this, I'll be knocked out. And I know the miserable gambler who is behind the whole deal. His name is Black Elrich!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ON THE FIELD.

No baseball-game in Denver had ever turned out a larger crowd. The story of the betting had been told by the newspapers, and that, together with the fact that the great college man, Merriwell, was the manager, captain, and pitcher for the team pitted against the Reds, served to bring the people swarming to the ball-grounds.

The story of the strange injury of Bart Hodge had also been told by the papers, and they had said that Merriwell could not do his best in the box without Hodge for a catcher. This being the case, the majority of the public felt convinced that the Denver team would win.

Of course, the papers had scouted the idea that Bart's hand had been injured to keep him from catching, even though Hodge himself hotly declared that as his firm belief. Merriwell, also, believed such to be the case, as did the other members of the team.

At first it had seemed that the nine was disastrously crippled, but Hodge had said:

"It's my left hand. In her haste, the old hag did not stop to see if it was my throwing-hand. Had

she put the stuff on my right hand it would have knocked me out. Now, I am going to catch."

"But you can't do it!" exclaimed Rattleton.

"I will!" grated Hodge. "I'll catch, if it takes my life!"

Frank shook his head.

"I'm afraid you can't," he confessed. "The doctor says not."

"Doctors do not know everything."

"But I'd rather lose the game, and Mr. Carson says he'd rather lose his money than have you permanently injure your hand."

"I'll not injure it permanently. The catcher's mitt will protect it, and I'll be behind the bat."

Frank admired this kind of grit, but he feared that Hodge might find himself seriously handicapped in the game.

When the afternoon of the game came, Bart got into his new suit with the others, although his hand was in a bandage.

The Reds were first to appear on the field, and the admirers of Denver's lively independent team rose up and gave them a warm greeting. They went out at once for practise, and their work was sharp, snappy, and professional.

Just as the regular time for the practise of the home team had expired, Merriwell and his men entered the

field. They made a handsome appearance in their new suits, with a large white M on the bosom of every shirt, and the spectators generously gave them a hearty hand.

"Where's Merriwell?"

"Where's Hodge?"

"That's Hodge with the bandage on his hand."

"Is he going to catch?"

"He says he will."

"I don't believe he was hurt at all. It was a trick to fool the Reds."

"Can't fool them that way."

"Merriwell will fool them with his double-shoot."

"Double-shoot be jiggered! No man ever threw such a thing."

"Wait and see."

Such was the talk on the bleachers.

"Take the field," said Merry, and the men trotted out.

Then practise began. Two of the Denver men batted the balls out, while Bart and Frank made ready to do some warming up on the side.

The work of the Reds had been almost flawless in practise, but such could not be said of Merry's team. They showed their want of practise, although they went after everything with a will. Rattleton had not been playing ball for some time, and he was not used

to the ground around second, which caused him to make two bad fumbles of hot grounders.

"He's a dead one," declared the crowd.

Out in left field, Swiftwing misjudged the first ball he went after and failed to touch it when he should have done so.

"The Indian is no good," decided the bleachers.

Browning had not aroused himself, and he had a supremely weary air at first.

"First base is too lazy," said the spectators.

In this manner almost the entire team was condemned.

Bart had pulled on a mitt and Frank was throwing him some easy ones. If they hurt Bart's hand, he made no show of it; but Merry would be compelled to use different speed than that in a game.

Black Elrich and Dan Mahoney were sitting on the bleachers. Mahoney observed:

"It's a cinch!"

"I think so," said Elrich.

"No need to have gone to all that trouble about the catcher," muttered Mahoney.

"But I wanted to make sure. You know Lake said he is the only man who can hold Merriwell."

"You're five thousand in, with the five hundred added."

"I reckon. But what's this? There's the boy Mescal was after, and he's got a companion. Look at them! What are they going to do?"

Dick Merriwell and Old Joe Crowfoot were advancing toward the home plate.

CHAPTER XXIX.

HITS THAT DID NOT COUNT.

Frank Merriwell made a signal, and his men came trotting in from the field.

But the eyes of the spectators were on the strangely handsome boy and the wrinkled old Indian, the latter having his dirty red blanket wrapped about his shoulders. At the home plate, to which the boy seemed to lead the Indian, they stopped.

Some boys on the bleachers began to whoop like a whole pack of redskins. Unheeding everything, Old Joe slowly walked round the rubber plate, then stopped, extended his hands over it and made some queer signs, as if he were weaving a spell. A hush had fallen on the curious crowd.

Finally the aged Indian stooped and solemnly placed the flat of his hand upon the plate, as if blessing it. This done, he turned, and, accompanied by the boy, walked toward the bench. Again the urchins began to whoop, and the crowd laughed.

The umpire appeared and advanced onto the field. The Reds, of course, had their choice of innings, and they decided to go to bat first.

Merriwell's men were bunched about their leader, who was speaking to them in low tones.

"All ready," called the umpire.

Immediately, the Merries turned and trotted out onto the field once more, while the first batter of the home team picked out his stick and advanced toward the plate.

"Light on him right off the reel," said Dave Morley, who was sitting on the home bench. "Break his heart in the first inning."

Frank was in the box, while Bart Hodge adjusted his mitt behind the plate.

The batting-order of the two teams is here given:

MERRIES.	REDS.
Ready, 3b.	Jones, 1b.
Carson, ss.	Davis, rf.
Browning, 1b.	Croaker, 3b.
Gamp, cf.	Favor, c.
Hodge, c.	Gresham, cf.
Swiftwing, lf.	Arata, lf.
Rattleton, 2b.	Sawyer, ss.
Carker, rf.	Mahoney, 2b.
Merriwell, p.	Park, p.

"Play ball!" rang out the voice of the umpire.

Merriwell placed his foot upon the pitcher's plate and prepared to deliver the ball. Every man was ready.

Frank was cautious about using speed at first, and he tried Jones on a slow drop.

Crack! The bat met the ball, and Jones lifted a pretty single just over the infield, prancing down to first like a long-geared race-horse, while the crowd gave a shout of satisfaction.

"The very first one!" laughed Morley. "Why, I knew it was a snap!"

"Mr. Umpire," said Frank quietly, "if that gentleman is going to make remarks, kindly ask him to leave the players' bench."

"That's right Morley," said the umpire, "you will have to keep still while you are on the bench."

This caused the crowd to howl derisively, and it seemed that the Merries had very few friends present.

Davis was ready to strike, and Frank gave him a wide out drop. He let it pass, and Jones took the opportunity to hustle for second in an attempt to steal.

Hodge took the ball, did not swing, but seemed to pull his hand just back to his ear, and then threw to second. It was a quick, easy throw, and it did not seem that Bart put enough force into it to send the ball down.

"Slide!" yelled the coacher.

Jones had been running like a deer, for he was the best base-stealer on the team, as well as the surest hitter. Forward he flung himself, sliding gracefully along the ground with his hands outstretched.

The ball came into Rattleton's hands about two feet from the ground, and Harry had it on the runner when Jones' hands were yet a foot from the bag.

"Man is out!" announced the umpire.

A hush fell on the crowd, and then somebody started the clapping, which was rather generous.

"Say, that catcher can throw!" cried a man on the bleachers. "Bet you don't steal many bags on him to-day."

The first man was out, and the Reds had been taught a lesson they would not fail to profit by. They had found that Hodge was a beautiful thrower, so that it was dangerous to try to steal.

"Hard luck, old man," said several of the players, as Jones came in. "But he got you, all right."

"And I thought I had a good start, too," said Jones. "I'd bet my shirt I had that bag."

One ball had been called on Frank. He tried a high one next time, and another ball was called.

Then Davis fouled, which caused the umpire to call a strike on him.

"Put another in the same place," invited the batter.

Frank seemed to accommodate him, and Davis cracked it out, driving it past Carson, who did not touch it.

Another base-hit had been made off Merry.

"That's two of the five!" exclaimed Elrich, in satisfaction. "When three more are made I'll have won one thousand dollars, anyhow."

Croaker was a heavy hitter. Merry suspected it, and he tried his arts to pull the fellow, but three balls were called.

Davis had not attempted to steal, for he remembered the fate of the man ahead of him, and Merry held him close to the bag.

It seemed, however, that Frank was certain to give the next batter a base on balls. He was forced to put the ball over, which he did.

Mahoney, the captain of the team, had advised the batter to "play the game," which prevented him from striking, although he afterward declared that the ball came sailing over the plate "as big as a house."

A strike was called. Frank calmly put another in the same place, and it was another strike.

Croaker gripped his bat. The coachers warned Davis to run, as the batter would be out on the third strike, anyhow, if the first base was occupied.

So, as soon as Merriwell drew back his arm, Davis started hard for second. The ball was a swift high one, but Croaker met it and drove it out for a single that landed Davis on third.

"Here is where we score a hundred!" cried the

coachers. "Oh, say! is this the wonder we have been hearing about?"

Hodge called Merry in, and said to him, in a low tone:

"Speed up!"

"But——" said Frank.

"No buts," said Bart.

"Your hand."

"I'll hold them."

"All right."

Then they returned to their places.

"Down on the first one," was the advice of the coacher near first. "With Davis on third, he'll never throw to second."

Frank sent in a swift in shoot, having compelled Croaker to keep close to first. Croaker, however, confident that Bart would not throw to second, scudded for the bag.

Hodge seemed to throw to Merriwell, and Frank put up his hands, as if to catch the ball, which had been thrown high.

Seeing Davis had not started from third, Frank did not bring his hands together, but let the ball pass between them over his head. The ball struck the ground about ten feet from second and bounded straight into Harry's waiting hands.

The runner slid, but Harry touched him out, and

then sent the ball whistling home, for, having seen the ball go over Merry, Davis had started to score.

Davis had been fooled into clinging close to the base too long. The trick had worked well, for Hodge had thrown the ball so that Merry could catch it in case Davis started, but with sufficient force to take it to second on a long bound, if Merry saw fit to let it go. Had Davis started, Frank would have caught the ball and cut him off.

Now, although Davis ran as if his life depended on the issue, he could not get home in time, and Bart was waiting for him with the ball.

"Out second and home!" cried the umpire.

The spectators gasped, for they had been treated to a clever piece of work that showed them the Merries knew a thing or two about baseball.

Three hits had been made by the first three men at bat, yet the side had been retired without a run, through the clever work of Hodge, Merriwell, and Rattleton.

The Reds were disgusted over the result, but Black Elrich said:

"They can't keep that up, and Merriwell is fruit for the Reds. Every man can hit him. Two more hits mean a cool thousand for me, and there are eight innings to make them in."

"They're going to get twenty off him," said Dan

Mahoney. "My brother Pete is the worst hitter in the bunch, but he can lace that fellow all over the lot."

On the bleachers Old Joe Crowfoot was grimly smoking his pipe, but by his side sat an excited boy, whose face was flushed and whose eyes shone.

"They didn't get a run, did they, Joe?" asked the boy eagerly.

"Ugh!" grunted the Indian. "Don't know. White man's game. Injun don't know him."

"But they did hit the ball," said Dick, in disappointment. "I didn't think Frank would let them do that."

"He throw um ball pretty quick," said Joe.

"He's afraid to do his best, I'm sure," said Dick. "He's afraid Hodge can't catch it."

"Hodge he heap big catch," asserted Crowfoot. "Not afraid of stick when it swing. Him good."

"We got out of a bad hole that time, fellows," said Frank, as the team gathered at the bench. "If we keep on playing ball like that we'll win this game."

"Those fellows will know better than to chance such takes—take such chances," said Rattleton.

"How is your hand, Bart?" asked Merry.

"All right," said Hodge.

Ready had chosen a bat.

"I'm going to drive the first one over Old Baldy,"

he said, with a motion toward the distant mountains. But he walked up to the plate and proceeded to strike out on the first three balls pitched.

"Speed!" he said, as he came back to the bench. "Whew! That fellow's got it! They didn't look larger than peas as they came over."

Carson went out and fouled twice, getting strikes called on him. Then he drove a short one to the pitcher and was thrown out.

"See if you can't start the ball rolling, Bruce," urged Merry.

Browning, however, did not seem much more than half-awake, and he, too, fell before the speed and sharp curves of Park, making the third man.

Favor took his place at the plate, and Merry faced him in the box. Frank gave the fellow a high one to start with, but Favor was confident and hit it safely past Ready.

"Four hits!" counted Elrich exultantly. "One more gives me a thousand."

Before the ball could be fielded in Favor had reached second and was safe.

"Everybody hits him!" shouted a voice from the bleachers. "Is this the great Frank Merriwell?"

Tears of rage came into Dick Merriwell's eyes, and his hands were tighty clenched.

"Why doesn't he use the double-shoot?" panted the boy. "He hasn't tried it once."

Frank was as calm as ever. Gresham, a stout, solid-looking chap, grinned tauntingly as he took his place to strike. Frank tried to pull him, but two balls were called. Then Merry put one over the corner, and Gresham batted it down to Ready.

Jack should have handled the ball, but he did not get it up in time to cut Gresham off at first. Seeing he was too late, he took no chances of a wild throw, and did not throw at all.

"Oh, wow! wow!" roared the crowd. "All to pieces! How easy! how easy!"

Hodge was looking black as a thunder-cloud. The game was not pleasing him at all. Was it possible Frank has lost some of his skill?

Arata, a stocky young Indian, advanced to the plate. He showed his teeth to Merry, who gave him a pretty one on the outside corner.

Arata smashed it hard, driving it on a line over Frank's head.

Like a flash Merriwell shot into the air and pulled down the ball with one hand. Like a flash he whirled round and threw to Rattleton.

As the bat met the ball, both Favor and Gresham had started to run. They did not realize Merry had caught the ball until Frank threw to second.

Rattleton took the throw, touched the bag and drove the ball whistling to first.

Gresham had stopped and was trying to scramble back to first, but the ball got there ahead of him, being smothered in Browning's mitt.

"Batter out!" announced the umpire. "Out second and first!"

It was a triple play!

Dick Merriwell flung his hat into the air, giving a shrill yell of joy. The yell was taken up by the crowd, for this was the sort of ball-playing to delight the cranks.

The Merries were fast winning friends.

The shout of applause having subsided, somebody cried:

"Why, you fellows don't need a pitcher! You can play the game with any kind of a man in the box!"

Mahoney, the captain of the Reds, was sore, but he told his men that it would not happen again in a thousand years.

Gamp was the first hitter of the Merries, and the long youth from New Hampshire drove the ball out to Gresham, who made a very pretty catch.

Hodge hit savagely, but his temper was not right to connect with Park's curves, and he fanned.

Then came Swiftwing. Again the collection of boys

whooped like a lot of Indians from the bleachers. The Indian put up an infield fly, and was out.

"Give us the double-shoot at your best speed, Merriwell," said Hodge, in a low tone. "Just show these chumps you can pitch a little."

"All right," nodded Frank; "if you can handle it with that hand, you shall have it."

"Don't worry about me," said Bart.

"Now," said Dan Mahoney, "you'll see my brother get a hit."

"I hope so," said Elrich, "for it wins the first thousand for me."

Mahoney came to the plate. He had seen others hitting Frank, and he felt fully confident he could do so. Merry gave him a swift double-shoot to start with, and he fanned, gasped, rubbed his eyes and looked amazed.

"Do that again," he invited.

Merry did, and again he fanned.

The third one was a slow drop that dragged him, and he did not hit it. Frank had struck out his first man.

Park was not much of a hitter, and Merry found him easy, striking him out quite as easy as he had Mahoney.

"Those are the weak men!" cried somebody. "Now, let's see you do it to Jones."

Being thus invited, Frank sent in his prettiest double-shoot, and Jones missed the first one.

"Hello!" muttered Jones, as he gripped the bat. "That was a queer one. If I didn't know better, I should say——"

He did not mutter what he should say, for Frank was ready and another came buzzing past, only the curves were reversed.

Again Jones bit at it and failed to connect.

"Two strikes!" called the umpire.

"Oh, he's doing it now!" breathed Dick Merriwell, in delight.

Every ball hurt Bart's hand, but he held them all and showed no sign of pain.

Jones was mad and surprised, which made him easy for the third double-shoot, and he, like the two before him, struck out.

Not one of the three men had even fouled the ball.

"Well, well!" roared a spectator. "It seems that you've got a pitcher there, after all!"

"Thanks, most astute sir," chirped Ready, doffing his cap and bowing. "He hasnt begun to pitch yet. He's just getting warmed up."

CHAPTER XXX.

ONE TO NOTHING.

It was the beginning of the ninth inning, and neither side had scored. Never before had there been such an exciting game in the city of Denver. The crowd was throbbing, and Merriwell's team had won a host of friends by its clever work. Since the second inning, however, Frank had given his men no chance to show what they could do, for he had struck out man after man, just as fast as they came up. Never in all his life had he been in better form, and his work was something to amaze his most intimate friends.

Bart Hodge, with his arm paining him from the tip of his fingers to the shoulder, looked very well satisfied.

Dick Merriwell was wild with delight and admiration. He heard the crowd wondering at the work of Frank and cheering at it, and it warmed his heart toward the brother he had once thought he hated.

"Oh, Joe!" he panted, "did you ever see anything like it?"

"Ugh! No see before," answered Crowfoot, still smoking.

"Isn't it fine?"

"Heap big noise. Ev'rybody yell lot; nobody get killed yet."

Three times had Merriwell's men reached third, but, by sharp work, the home team had kept them from scoring. Now, however, Morley was desperate, and he went among the men, urging them to win the game.

"You must win it!" he said. "Elrich loses five thousand and five hundred dollars if you don't. He won't back the team another day. We'll have to disband."

"We'd win if we could hit that devil in the box," said Mahoney bitterly. "He's the worst man we ever went up against, and we all know it now. You'll never hear me tell anybody after this that there is no such thing as a double-shoot. Why, that fellow can throw regular corkscrew curves!"

Morley swore.

"You're quitting!" he growled.

"Did you ever know me to quit?" asked Mahoney angrily.

"No, but——"

"Then don't talk! They have not scored, and we may be able to make this a draw game, if we can't get in a run."

Black Elrich was worried, although his face looked perfectly calm, with the strained expression of the

gambler who is unchangeable before victory or defeat. At his side, Dan Mahoney was seething.

"Hang it!" he grated. "If it had only been that catcher's right hand! The woman made a terrible blunder!"

"No one would have thought him able to catch, anyhow," said Elrich.

"The big mitt protects his hand."

"Still, it must hurt him every time the ball strikes, for Merriwell has been using all kinds of speed."

Morley came up to the place where he knew Elrich was sitting.

"What do you think?" he asked, in a low tone. "The boys can't hit Merriwell, and it's too late to try to buy Harris, the umpire, now. Can't you start a riot and break up the game?"

"If you start it, it is worth a hundred dollars to you," said Elrich, "even though that will throw all bets off, and I'll make nothing. What say?"

"I can't!" muttered Morley. "If I did so, Harris would give the game to the other side, and you'd lose just the same. If the spectators start it, it will be all right."

"The spectators won't," said the gambler. "More than three-fourths of them are Merriwell men now."

"Then," said Morley, "I am afraid for the result."

Well might he be afraid. In the last inning Frank was just as effective as ever, and the batters fell before him in a way that was perfectly heart-breaking to the admirers of the home team. Denver was unable to score in the ninth.

"We must shut them out again, boys," said Mahoney, as his men took the field.

But Merriwell's team went after that game in their half of the ninth. Carker was the first man up. He had not been hitting, and Park considered him easy. That was when Park made a mistake, for Greg set his teeth and laced out the first ball in a most terrific manner.

It was a clean two-bagger. But Carker tried to make it three, encouraged by Ready on the coaching-line. Ready believed in taking desperate chances to score, and he waved for Greg to come on.

The crowd was standing again, shouting wildly as Carker tore across second and started on a mad sprint to third.

The center-fielder got the ball and threw it to Mahoney at second. Mahoney whirled and shot it to third.

"Slide!" shrieked Ready.

Greg heard the command and obeyed, but Croaker took the ball and touched him easily.

"Runner out!" decided the umpire clearly.

Then there was another roar from the bleachers.

Jack Ready fiercely doubled his fist and thumped himself behind the ear.

"All my fault!" he moaned. "I did it!"

Carker looked sorrowful.

"My last game of baseball," he said sadly. "I do not care to play the game any more. It is a deception and a humiliation. No more! No more!"

Merriwell was the next batter. Park knew Merry was a good hitter, and he was cautious. Frank did his best to work the pitcher for a base on balls, but, with two strikes called on him, he was finally forced to hit.

He did so sharply, sending the ball shooting along the ground between third and short.

Frank crossed first and turned to the left, knowing it was best to have all the start he could if there was any show of making second.

"Go on!" roared Browning, who had reached the coaching-line at first, Ready, having come in from near third.

Then Frank ran at his best speed. He knew it would be close, and he flung himself forward for a slide at second, which enabled him to reach the base safely a moment ahead of the ball. By fast running, he had made a two-bagger out of an ordinary single.

Everybody knew now that Merriwell's team was out for the game in that inning if there was any possible way to capture it. Such work turned the fans into howling maniacs.

For once in his life, Jack Ready looked grave when he took his place to strike. He realized the responsibility on him, and it had driven the smile from his ruddy face.

Park was pitching at his best, and he did not let up a bit. Ready made two fouls, after which he put up a high infield fly, which dropped and remained in the hands of Croaker. Two men were out, and the admirers of the home team began to breathe easier.

Merriwell was taking all the start he could get from second when Carson got ready to hit.

Park seemed to feel absolutely sure of retiring the side without further trouble, and he did get two strikes on Berlin. Then something happened, for the cattleman's son did a thing to delight the heart of his father. He made a beautiful safe hit to right field and won the game.

Merriwell was running when the ball and bat met. He knew it was not a high fly, and instinct told him the fielder could not catch it. As he came toward third, Hodge was on the coaching-line, madly motioning for him to go in.

Frank obeyed. The fielder threw from right to

cut him off at the plate, but, by another splendid slide, he scored.

The game was over.

* * * * * * *

In the newspaper accounts of the game the following day Merriwell's team was highly praised, and the reporters took pains to mention that it was the hit of Berlin Carson, a Colorado lad, that brought in the winning run.

The Denver papers contained a report of the attempted arrest of Anton Mescal, an old offender, who was disguised as a gipsy fortune-teller. Mescal had made a hot fight, shooting and severely wounding a policeman, after which he escaped.

THE END.

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Frank Merriwell's Brother

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